DECOLONIZING LITERACIES:

TRANSNATIONAL FEMINISM, LEGACIES OF COLONIALITY, AND PEDAGOGIES OF TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

Since the onset of the U.S.-led "Global War on Terror" (G.W.O.T.) and Afghan War in 2001, the literacy crisis of Afghan women has been central to the U.S.'s counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency doctrines, and to its post-conflict reconstruction efforts in the country. While many aspects of the G.W.O.T. have been subject to critical scrutiny over the last decade, literacy remains curiously absent from such discussions. This silence is primarily due to the widely-accepted views that literacy is a necessary precondition for female empowerment, and that the extension of literacy education to Afghan girls and women is therefore one of the few undisputed successes of the Afghan war. Troubling this conventional wisdom, this dissertation deploys an anti-racist transnational feminist framework to argue that the narratives of Afghan women's literacy crisis that have circulated within the Western imaginary since 9/11 are enmeshed in, and are forms of, the epistemic, semiotic, and political-economic violence that characterizes present-day practices of neo-liberal war and dispossession. They have been central to U.S. foreign policy discourse because they install a civilizational divide between the "post-feminist," literate West – where gender and sexual justice allegedly have been achieved – and the racialized and gendered figures of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" in need of saving from "dangerous Muslim men" (Razack 2008, 5). As such, these narratives have served to legitimate not only the Afghan war, but also the modernization of Afghan women according to a Western neo-liberal agenda and the normalization of a particular image of Western gender and sexual exceptionalism that conceals continuing gender, sexual, colonial, racial, and class disparities at "home."

This study traces the disavowed and forgotten colonial legacies of this divide between the literate West and the illiterate Other to the colonization of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the history of racialized slavery in the U.S., and the institutionalization of the literacy/orality divide in mid-twentieth century sociolinguistics and anthropology. Moreover, it explores how such legacies of coloniality are reproduced in the liberal feminist internationalism of Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach to international development – which emphasizes female pain and suffering in the global south – and some forms of third-wave international feminism – which celebrate female empowerment and the pleasures of trans and gender-variant subjects. Finally, this study contends that feminists committed to the liberatory potential of literacy must grapple with the promises and failures of anti-colonial (Paulo Freire) and postcolonial (Gayatri Spivak) theories of literacy in order to elaborate literacies of decolonization: ways of reading and writing the word and the world that challenge the epistemic domination of subaltern knowledges, while also elaborating alternative political imaginaries and pedagogies of hope and transformation that move beyond the necropolitics of the neo-liberal global order.

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INTRODUCTION

In January 2007, *Three Cups of Tea: One Man's Mission to Promote Peace...One School at a Time* reached #1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Co-written by Greg Mortenson and David Oliver Relin (2006), the memoire tells the heroic tale of U.S. "mountaineer-turned-humanitarian" Mortenson's decade-long mission to build schools for girls and women in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Jones 2010). The key elements of Mortenson's story are well-known. In 1993, after an unsuccessful attempt at climbing Pakistan's K2 – the world's second highest mountain – Mortenson recovered in the village of Korphe. When he asked to visit the village school, Mortenson (2006) encountered a group of children "kneeling on the frosty ground" and learning to write by "scratching their lessons in the dirt with sticks" (31-32). At the request of a young girl, Mortenson pledged to return to open a school in the village (Williams 2008). Described on the book's dust-jacket as an "astonishing, uplifting story of a real-life Indiana Jones," *Three Cups of Tea* recounts Mortenson's success in establishing a school in Korphe, starting his charity Central Asia Institute (C.A.I.) dedicated to empowering girls and women through literacy and education, and building fifty-five schools on the Afghanistan/Pakistan border during the decade between 1993 and 2003.

After the paperback version of *Three Cups of Tea* was released, it soon became "required reading," not solely for women's book clubs and church groups across the U.S., but for many senior U.S. military men as well (Bumiller 2010; Jones 2010). Several top military commanders – including Admiral Mike Mullen (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2007-2011), General Stanley McChrystal (Commander of U.S. and International

Security Assistance Forces [I.S.A.F.] in Afghanistan, 2009-2010), and General David Petraeus (McChrystal's replacement in Afghanistan until 2011) – were urged by their wives to read Mortenson's tale of bringing peace "one school at a time" to the villages of Central Asia. These commanders publicly declared their support for Mortenson and C.A.I., attended the opening of his schools, invited him to lecture at military bases across the U.S. and Afghanistan, and ordered their soldiers to read his book (Bumiller 2010).

The warm response Mortenson's story received within the upper echelons of the U.S. military coincided with a pivotal shift in U.S. military strategy in Afghanistan. At the outset of the Afghan war in October 2001, the Bush administration primarily pursued a counter-terrorism doctrine that aimed to annihilate the Taliban. However, in 2006, in response to the rise of insurgent activity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, Bush adopted a counter-insurgency strategy that focused on winning the "hearts and minds" of Afghan citizens to the cause of the U.S. The Obama administration strengthened Bush's counter-insurgency effort by emphasizing the role of diplomacy and development alongside defence in the U.S.'s war strategy (Bell and Evans 2010).[1] The U.S. military consulted Mortenson about how to convert this counter-insurgency doctrine into on-the-ground initiatives. Mortenson served as a liaison between U.S.-I.S.A.F. soldiers and tribal elders, and provided background information on the communities targeted by the U.S.-I.S.A.F. (Bumiller 2010; Jones 2010). As a cultural interpreter for and collaborator with the U.S. military, Mortenson knew that he risked jeopardizing his relationships with the communities he sought to help and endangering the girls and women who attended his

[1] In 2010, Obama donated $100,000 of his Nobel peace prize award to Mortenson's charity (White House 2010).

schools since they would be viewed by the Taliban as recipients of U.S. military aid. Yet, as he notes in *Stones into Schools* (his 2009 sequel to *Three Cups of Tea*), he willingly assisted the U.S. military in the hopes that it would learn from past mistakes and realize that books – rather than war and militarism – are the means to combat terrorism and promote peace in the region.

While *Three Cups of Tea* served as Mortenson's access-key to the corridors of U.S. military power, the book also led to his downfall. In April 2011, the T.V. show *60 Minutes* and author Jon Krakauer investigated Mortenson's story. Their exposés concluded that Mortenson never visited Korphe in 1993, and that C.A.I. had not built all the schools that the book suggested (Haq 2011). Moreover, Krakauer's (2011) *Three Cups of Deceit* revealed that many of Mortenson's schools had been abandoned, and that these "ghost schools" had been left without teachers, resources, and support. Krakauer also alleged that Mortenson had spent the funds raised for C.A.I. on his promotional book tour, speaking engagements, and private expenses rather than on female literacy (Hessler 2011). Mortenson denied these accusations of fraud and financial misconduct (Barkhorn 2011; Bosman and Strom 2011). However, the controversy surrounding the book prompted Montana's Attorney General to start a year-long investigation into C.A.I. (which concluded in 2012 that Mortenson and the board had mismanaged funds); led book purchasers to bring a civil lawsuit against Mortenson, C.A.I., co-author Relin, and Penguin Publishing; and precipitated, at least in part, co-author Relin's suicide in 2012 (Haq 2012; Richey 2012).

Both the popularity of *Three Cups of Tea* and the international scandal it provoked are unsurprising. Mortenson's focus on the interconnection between literacy and female political empowerment reflects the widely-held views that literacy is uniformly a social good and a panacea for gender oppression. It also echoes the new conventional wisdom about the importance of integrating both education and women into the post-war reconstruction process.[2] The book's success, however, must be situated in the context of its publication: a political culture in which gendered, racialized, and sexualized narratives about Afghan women's plight at the hands of the Taliban regime – which denied women freedom of mobility, mandated them to wear the *burqa*, and excluded them from literacy and education – became mass-marketed commodities for Western consumption (Sensoy and Marshall 2010; Taylor and Zine 2014).

Although Afghan feminists began to challenge the Taliban's misogynist policies when the regime seized power in 1996, Afghan women's oppression became a *cause célèbre* in the West only after Al Qaeda's terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 11 September 2001 ("9/11"). As the Bush administration and its allies pursued the Afghan war (ostensibly in response to 9/11), U.S. political discourse and the Western mass media focused obsessively on Afghan women's victimization as evidence of the barbarity of the Taliban and a rationale for war (Stabile 2005; Russo 2006). Many Western feminists working on global women's rights campaigns welcomed this new attention to the Taliban's system of "gender apartheid," which they argued stripped women "of their visibility, voice, and mobility" (Feminist Majority Foundation quoted in

[2] See Bush and Saltarelli (2000) for the role of education in reconstruction. For the centrality of gender to reconstruction, see Sorenson (1988), Cohn et al. (2004), and Cohn (2008).

Russo 2006, 565; Hunt 2006). Bolstering the image of the U.S. as a benevolent saviour of victimized Afghan women, these feminists publicly endorsed the Afghan war as a way to liberate Afghan women and provide them with the same educational opportunities granted to women in the West (Russo 2006). It is within this political climate that *Three Cups of Tea* and other texts focusing on Muslim women's victimization – such as *My Forbidden Face: Growing Up Under the Taliban* (Latifa 2001) and *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (Nafisi 2003) – became international bestsellers.

That U.S. military commanders embraced *Three Cups of Tea* almost a decade after the onset of the Afghan war also highlights the crucial role that literacy has continued to play in what the Pentagon calls the "long war" – a permanent war that is "unlimited in time or space" (Tisdall and MacAskill 2006) – or what I refer to in this dissertation as the "new imperialism" – a term I define below. The close ties between Mortenson and the U.S. military show that the humanitarian project of helping the suffering and dispossessed, once viewed as separate from and a response to war, has become a pillar of post-Cold War international security policies and military strategy (Duffield 2001, 2005, 2007). Not only has the Afghan war been portrayed as a mission to both "drive out the Taliban and the terrorists" and "lift up" Afghan women through literacy programs (most of which are informed by the existing neo-liberal orthodoxy in development circles) (Bush 2002b; Bush 2001b).[3] Aid itself has become increasingly

[3] Neo-liberalism refers to a particular philosophy of governance that, grounded in neo-classical economics and laissez-faire liberalism, elevates the market over the public sphere of the state, advocates the commodification or displacement of public goods onto the market or the individual, and seeks to remake the state according to market principles of "efficiency" and project management and to thereby diminish the space for democratic debate on the political good. Urging a return to the "free-market" strategies of the nineteenth century, the paradigm of neo-

militarized as the counter-insurgency strategy mobilized U.S.-I.S.A.F. soldiers to simultaneously fight the enemy and implement development programs in the areas of literacy, education, hygiene, and human rights training in Afghanistan (C. Bell 2011; Chishti 2010). As I.S.A.F. prepared to withdraw N.A.T.O. troops from Afghanistan and the U.S. officially ended its combat operations there in December 2014, it is these literacy initiatives in particular that Western politicians and journalists – including many feminist commentators – have championed as evidence of the Afghan war's success.

At the same time, the controversy around *Three Cups of Tea* reveals that humanitarianism has become a lucrative industry. This is particularly the case for those, like Mortenson, willing to trade in nostalgic accounts of what Rudyard Kipling (1899) – the nineteenth-century apologist for British imperialism – famously called the "white man's burden" to bring civilization to the uncivilized and to save those child-like peoples deemed incapable of helping themselves (Razack 2004; Slaughter 2009; Kapoor 2013). Indeed, the *Three Cups of Tea* saga highlights the extent to which literacy, in the post-9/11 era, has come to serve political, economic, and cultural agendas that very much diverge from the girl-child's wish to learn to read and write that supposedly launched Mortenson's mission.

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liberalism maintains that the dismantling and decentralization of bureaucratic controls, the deregulation of the economy, and the greater reliance on free market forces to allocate national resources are the most efficient routes to economic growth and recovery from crises of capital accumulation. At the same time, neo-liberalism is a political project that aims to transform commonsense, re-organize the social, and replace the notions of social citizenship and collective responsibility for the community's well-being and risk (illness, unemployment, poverty, etc.) that undergirded the social policy regime of the post-WWII welfare state with a new doctrine of individual responsibility for success or failure in the market (See Lemke 2001; Brown 2003).

The *Three Cups of Tea* scandal and the centrality of literacy to the Afghan war trap feminist scholars and activists committed to the freedom-enhancing potential of literacy in a difficult bind: How can feminists challenge patriarchal forces – such as the Taliban – that deny women access to literacy without being complicit in and supportive of a militarized humanitarianism that positions non-Western girls and women solely as objects to be saved by benevolent Westerners and that encourages war as an appropriate response to their literacy crisis? If we criticize do-gooders, such as Mortenson, for profiting from the suffering of poor women in the global south and the U.S. military for turning literacy into a tool of the counter-insurgency, do we risk losing out on one possible benevolent outcome of an otherwise devastating Afghan war: Western support of and funding for literacy programs targeting girls and women in the global south? Indeed, as the feminist journalist Katha Pollit (2011) asks in her *Nation* article on the Mortenson scandal, are the real victims of this controversy the girls and women who benefit from Western aid? What might be involved in articulating a feminist politics of literacy that starts, not with the salvation myth of Western humanitarians like Mortenson, but with the girl-child's wish for literacy – a wish that marks the margins of Mortenson's text but never appears as anything other than inspiration for his hero story? What would it mean to retell Mortenson's story from her perspective without co-opting her voice for our own purposes?

The primary aim of *Decolonizing Literacies* is to articulate a way out of such dilemmas by re-visioning literacy as a decolonizing feminist practice. I suggest that this act of re-visioning needs to address two simultaneous projects: one that is critical of the

long-standing relationship between literacy and the politics of empire, and another that elaborates new visions of literacy that point to alternative futures and ways of being. My argument in what follows is that a feminist politics of literacy committed to resisting, rather than reproducing, patriarchal and imperialist agendas must involve the *decolonization of literacy*: a critique of the colonial logic at work not only in neo-imperial accounts of Afghan women's literacy crisis, but also in some international feminist attempts to rescue women in the "third world" from traditional gender relations through literacy. Yet, while I hope to problematize the view of literacy as panacea for gender oppression and to deconstruct its colonial histories, my intention is not to reject literacy as a tool of imperial domination. Rather, I propose that feminists must supplement any project of deconstruction and refusal with one that is creative and advances what I call *literacies of decolonization*: ways of reading and writing the word and the world that challenge the epistemic domination of subaltern knowledges, while also elaborating alternative political imaginaries and pedagogies of hope and transformation. This double movement is captured by my title – *Decolonizing Literacies* – in which "literacy" functions at once as an object in need of decolonization and as a mode of decolonization itself.

In order to develop this two-pronged approach to decolonizing literacies, I produce a critical genealogy – what Michel Foucault (1998a) calls a "history of the present" (374) – of literacy's deployment within colonial and neo-imperial imaginaries of domination and anti-colonial and postcolonial imaginaries of decolonization. I propose that the literacy crisis of Afghan women has been central to the neo-imperial imaginary

because it allows the U.S. to portray the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" who needs to be rescued into modernity and transformed into an ideal neo-liberal market actor through Western military and development interventions; that this construction of the "illiterate Third World woman" is rooted in the long history of colonial knowledge production about the division between literate and oral cultures and the superiority of Western alphabetic literacy – a division that has drawn from and reproduced not only cultural but also racial, gender, sexual, generational, and species hierarchies in order to mark certain groups of people as infrahuman (on the boundaries of humanity) or inhuman (akin to animals); that this division between the literate and the oral, and the hierarchy of cultures and peoples upon which it relies, is reproduced in the liberal internationalist politics of both second-wave feminists – who emphasize female pain and suffering in the global south – and third-wave feminists – who celebrate female empowerment and non-normative gender identities (including trans and gender-variant identities); and that traditions of anti-colonial and postcolonial thought seek to undo this division by re-imagining literacy as a liberatory praxis that begins with the oppressed and subaltern as producers of knowledge and political agents with and from whom the educator must learn how to learn.

My central concern in this study is therefore not to outline the formal characteristics of literacy, a topic on which there is already a very large body of scholarship and much debate.[4] I instead follow the advice of Margaret Ferguson (2003),

[4] See for instance Heath (1983); Gee (1990); Barton (1994); Ferdman et al. (1994); Olson (1994); Baynham (1995); Street (1995); Brodkey (1996); Lankshear (1997); Warschauer (1999); Cope and Kalantzis (2000); Hawisher and Selfe (2005); Graff and Duffy (2008).

who proposes to scholars of literacy that "instead of asking, 'What is literacy?' we might ask, rather, 'What counts as literacy for whom, and under what particular circumstances?'" (4). My interest is in how literacy has been defined, and what political ends such definitions have served across various political projects. As I shall demonstrate, neo-imperial, colonial, and international liberal feminist projects pivot on what the literacy scholar Brian Street (2011) calls the "autonomous model" of literacy (581). This model equates literacy with a set of technical and instrumental reading and writing skills, and proffers that literacy "in itself, autonomously, defined independently of cultural context and meaning, will have effects, creating inequality for those who 'lack' it and advantages for those who gain it" (581). While this model of literacy appears innocent, I seek to show here that it is produced through and productive of unequal relations of epistemic and political power.

Indeed, as scholars working in the New Literacy Studies School reveal, this autonomous model conceals and devalues the daily literacy practices that occur outside institutions of formal schooling. It is thus productive of "otherized" forms of literacy – forms that in relation to the technical definition of literacy are classified as "illiteracy."[5] Yet, I argue that it is not only the minimalist definition of literacy as a set of technical

[5] The New Literacy Studies School emerged in the U.K., and explores the range of "literacy events" and "literacy practices" that occur outside the realm of formal schooling and inside social locations such as homes, neighbourhoods, and communities. Focusing on these "informal" literacies (literacies that people learn and practice in their everyday worlds), New Literacy Studies has revealed that the technical-rational approach to literacy is part and parcel of institutionalized configurations of knowledge and power that marginalize the informal literacies that people use in the different domains of everyday life and the meanings that these everyday practices of literacy have for them. Founding texts in this field include: Heath (1983); Gee (1990); Mitchell and Weiler (1991); Baynham (1995); Street (1995); Prinsloo and Breier (1996); and Barton and Hamilton (1998).

skills that results in the marginalization of what Street (2009) calls the "multiple literacies" practiced by those classified as "illiterate" (137). This marginalization also, and perhaps more significantly, stems from the fact that within the autonomous model literacy never refers solely to a set of communicative practices. It is also deployed to demarcate the divisions between the "West and the Rest," civilized and barbarous cultures, modernity and tradition, free and unfree sex/gender orders, whites and non-whites, human and non-human, teacher and student, knowledge and ignorance, and rescuer and rescued.[6]

I also explore how traditions of anti-colonial and postcolonial thought challenge some of these divisions by advancing a more expansive definition of literacy as a mode of reading and writing the word and the world politically. This re-definition of literacy as a form of critical consciousness, rather than as only a set of technical reading and writing skills, contributes to struggles for decolonization by affirming the epistemic and political agency of oppressed and subaltern peoples that is denied by the autonomous model. And, perhaps more importantly, it provides a vision of decolonization itself as a pedagogical process of self and social transformation. Yet, I seek to show that aspects of the autonomous model – particularly the divisions between the human and the non-human and knowledge and ignorance – remain active and residual within the emergent visions of literacy proffered by anti-colonial and postcolonial thought. And, I inquire into how such residual elements affect the radical potential of these re-imaginings of literacy as an ethico-political act of decolonization.

[6] I borrow the phrase "West and the Rest" from Stuart Hall (1992).

By drawing attention to the ways in which these multiple meanings of literacy circulate across different political and cultural contexts, and have been deployed by various actors with contradictory and competing agendas, I hope to challenge the conventional view of literacy as a static and uniform entity. My aim is to instead highlight the diverse approaches to literacy – the *literacies* – advanced in these different projects. But my intention is not simply to outline the parameters of these diverse literacies. Rather, following Ferguson (2003), I want to uncover how they have served as sites of "social contest" in which struggles over power and domination have been waged, human identities and differences defined, and social and political subjectivities produced (5).

Indeed, the purpose of genealogy, as a history of the present, is not to unearth the "true" or essential meaning of events. Since genealogical investigations seek to demonstrate "how we have been trapped in our own history" (Foucault 1998a, 329), this mode of history writing instead works primarily by calling into question all those categories that continue to have meaning for us and through which the present becomes intelligible or "common sense," to borrow from Gramsci (1971, 370). This study thus presents a history of ideas and imaginings (of figures and images), of the regimes of representation through which the present is rendered intelligible, and of how oppositional political movements provide different imaginings of possible selves and worlds. It therefore does not offer an empirical investigation of the history of Afghan women and Afghanistan. Nor does it provide strategies about how to best develop literacy initiatives in the country. Rather, as a history of the present, as a genealogy, this study instead traces

the continuities between past and present discourses as well as the discontinuities and reversals in the history of ideas: "the accidents, minute deviations – or conversely, the complete reversals – the errors, false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things which continue to exist and have value for us" (Foucault 1998c, 374). Following Foucault's method, this dissertation traces the polyvalent mobility of literacy as a trope. In so doing, it works to unpack how such a seemingly mundane and quotidian issue as literacy has been harnessed to the gendered, racialized, and sexualized neo-liberal logics of war and terror; to how literacy – as a sign of enlightenment, freedom, and progress – can so easily revert into its opposite – a tool of domination; to the paternalism and violence that undergirds the view of literacy as a remedy for gender oppression; to how feminist theories of literacy reproduce older relations of coloniality; to the ways in which gender variant and trans identities and politics that question the Western sex/gender binary have been harnessed to the doctrine of Western exceptionalism and empire; and to the promises and failures of anti-colonial and postcolonial theories of literacy.

I. Transnational Feminism as Method

To the extent that this study seeks to unravel the various entanglements of literacy with broader historical formations – in this case empire, neo-liberalism, colonization, racialization, heteropatriarchy, international feminism, and struggles for decolonization – it is inspired not solely by Foucault's genealogical investigations. It is also influenced by the field of anti-racist transnational feminist scholarship and activism. Transnational feminism emerged in the mid-1990s as a critique of those models of "global sisterhood"

that posit women's common experience of patriarchal oppression as the basis for international feminist politics. In contrast to the essentialism and universalism that characterizes global sisterhood, transnational feminism instead draws upon the insights of critical race, postcolonial, queer, and third world feminisms in order to advance an integrative and intersectional approach that foregrounds the centrality of issues of colonization, racial formations, nationalism, global capitalism, and empire to analyses of gender and sexual oppression and resistance.

Taking up and expanding upon the insights of black and anti-racist feminist thought, transnational feminism considers how multiple systems of domination and subordination operate simultaneously and thus comprise what Patricia Hill Collins (1990) calls a "matrix of domination" (228). Rather than treat identity categories as discrete and mutually exclusive, it instead draws attention to what Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) calls "intragroup" differences: to the diversity and power relations constitutive of all such categories (1242). Transnational feminism thus highlights how gendered identities are mediated by race, culture, class, age, ability, sexuality, and citizenship status in particular historical and geographic locations. Following in the tradition of postcolonial feminism, it explores how such identities shift and change as they travel across multiple socio-historical, geo-political, and global circuits. At the same time, scholars have increasingly tried to integrate transnational feminism with queer and trans theory, and in so doing have provoked a critical reassessment of some of the foundational assumptions of these fields. On the one hand, queer and trans theory points to the need for transnational feminists to question the normative sex/gender binary structure whereby all persons and

bodies are assigned as either male/female, masculine/feminine, and hetero/homo-sexual, and to explore different articulations of gender variance across borders (Lugones 2007). On the other hand, transnational feminism demonstrates the need to critique the politics of normalization and legitimation within U.S., Canadian, and European LBGTQ communities in which white, middle class queer subjects gain visibility and accommodation while other racialized and queer bodies are marked as deviant, pathological, and slated for death (Puar 2007; Haritaworn et al. 2014).

One of the strengths of transnational feminism is therefore that it offers more than a theory of the multiplicity and instability of identities and identifications. It also accounts for how multiple systems of power are interconnected: how they come into existence in and through each other, uphold and sustain one another, and grant "various degrees of penalty and privilege" to the subjects located within them (Collins 1990, 229; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Razack 2008). In so doing, it draws attention to how subordinate subjects are never politically innocent, but instead both resist and participate in multiple relations of power (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Mohanty 2003; Alexander 2005).

In addition to this intersectional analysis of power, there are several additional tenets of transnational feminism that inform this dissertation. First, transnational feminism seeks to move beyond what Himani Bannerji (1995) calls the "stance of cultural capital versus economic capital…discourse or forms of consciousness versus political economy" that pits cultural studies in opposition to studies of political economy (36). It instead develops interdisciplinary analyses that situate both the cultural politics of

representational regimes and what Judith Butler (1997) calls the "psychic life of power" within particular geopolitical and economic formations (Grewal and Kaplan 1994). Second, transnational feminism challenges linear conceptions of history that treat the past, present, and future as progressive stages of temporal development (Alexander 2005). Just as Foucault's method of history writing outlines the continuities and discontinuities in history, transnational feminism also works to historicize the present – to link the transnational flows of capital, ideas, cultures, and peoples that characterize the current era of capitalist globalization and empire to older histories of slavery, colonialism, and imperialism (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Trotz 2007).

Third, transnational feminism questions a dichotomous spatial logic that "reinforces ideas of 'here' and 'there' as place-bound, non-intersecting and discrete"; it instead develops relational analyses that map how different subjects and places are constituted in "relation to each other" (Trotz 2007, 4, 7). On the one hand, such a relational analysis reveals how cultural constructs such as the "literate" and the "illiterate," the "Western woman" and the "third world woman," are not mutually exclusive but are instead discursively constituted in opposition to each other, and thus are dependent upon each other for their meaning (Pedwell 2010). On the other hand, transnational feminism aims to highlight how what is happening "here" is connected to what is happening "over there." It thus explores how cross-border economic and cultural processes are affecting differently-situated subjects in uneven though comparable ways depending on their particular social, political, and geographic context (Mohanty 2003). And, in doing so, it points to the commonalities between and among the lives of such

subjects, while nevertheless remaining vigilant against ignoring their different social positions in global circuits of power (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Grewal 2005).

Fourth, as a form of political activism, transnational feminism draws upon the tradition of third world feminism in order to challenge the Western feminist claim to represent and speak for women in the global south. Informed by Trinh Minh-ha (1989), Chandra Mohanty (1991), and Uma Narayan (1997), transnational feminists point to how Western feminists committed to the project of global sisterhood tend to produce an ahistorical and monolithic image of the "Third World woman" as a victim of patriarchal traditions and, in so doing, to constitute the white, Western feminist as emancipated and as the proper subject of feminist politics. Transnational feminism thus calls upon Western feminists to adopt a reflexive politics that takes stock of our own privileged position in global politics, and to critically interrogate those moments when feminist projects repeat the politics of empire and reproduce long-standing racial, class, and national hierarchies (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Trotz 2007). In addition, transnational feminism challenges those anti-colonial theorists and activists who fail to address the interconnections between colonial power and systems of heteropatriarchy (Lugones 2007). It also draws attention to the implicit class privilege of postcolonial theorists who celebrate hybridity and migrancy as sites of knowledge production and therefore ignore the struggles of subaltern women or those migrant women barred from the promise of upward class mobility associated with Western migration (Spivak 1999a).

As an imminent critique of Western feminism, anticolonialism, and postcolonial thought, transnational feminism therefore highlights the exclusionary logic at the heart of

any oppositional movement that treats systems of oppression as distinct. In so doing, it opens up space for a decolonial feminism attuned to the complex intersections of multiple systems of exploitation and oppression in both the past and the present – a feminism that can enable the cultivation of cross-border solidarities and alliances based, not on the common identity of "woman," but instead on what Mohanty (2003) calls our "common context of struggle" (7). In the remainder of this introduction, I outline in more detail how this dissertation both builds on and contributes to these dimensions of transnational feminism.

II. Cultures of the New Imperialism

As a history of the present, *Decolonizing Literacies* takes as its starting point one of the dominant narrative frameworks produced by the Bush and Obama administrations' foreign policy and development discourses since the onset of the "Global War on Terror" (G.W.O.T.) and Afghan war: namely, that the Afghan war constituted a response, at least in part, to the literacy crisis of Afghan women, and that basic reading and writing skills can remedy gender oppression in the country. I show that, far from being a beacon of the U.S.'s nascent feminism, the narratives of Afghan women's literacy crisis that have circulated since 9/11 are instead enmeshed in, and are forms of, the epistemic, semiotic, and political-economic violence that characterizes present-day practices of neo-liberal war and dispossession. To be sure, the Taliban's misogynist regime did prohibit Afghan women's access to literacy and, as such, warrants critique and reprimand for its patriarchal policies. However, I shall demonstrate that, although neo-imperial narratives constantly refer to a literacy crisis amongst women in Afghanistan, they are rarely *about*

literacy at all. Literacy is instead used therein to install a racialized divide, disguised in the language of civilization and culture clash, between the "post-feminist"[7] literate West – where literacy is supposedly universally accessible and equality has been achieved – and the hyperfeminine figure of the helpless and voiceless "illiterate Third World woman" who is incapable of self-representation and thus requires rescue by the West.

Although governments in Australia, Canada, and England frequently appealed to the plight of "illiterate" Afghan women to justify their participation in and active support of the U.S.-led G.W.O.T., I focus on U.S. foreign policy and development discourses for a couple of reasons. First, U.S. government documents and speeches since 9/11 have produced a specific regime of representation about Afghan women. This regime served as the framework through which the U.S.'s allies – despite their distinct histories of imperialism and colonial settlement – came to understand their own roles in the Afghan war as defending Western "values" of gender equality, tolerance, and freedom and thus their national interests as commensurate with those of the U.S. – a phenomenon that Indepal Grewal (2002) calls the U.S.'s "transnational nationalism" (quoted in Thobani 2007, 234; Razack 2008). Second, the continuities and discontinuities between the Bush and Obama administrations' narratives of Afghan women's literacy crisis highlight some of the contradictory uses to which literacy has been put in the post-9/11 period. My

[7] When I use the term "post-feminist" in this dissertation, I am not referring to that field of feminist theory influenced by poststructuralist-inspired reconsiderations of the subject, identity, and politics, but to a socio-political conjuncture that takes itself to be after or beyond feminism. For a discussion of the various meanings of post-feminism across media, popular culture and feminist studies, see Genz and Brabon (2009).

analysis therefore centres on the U.S., not because it is exceptional, but because it offers a compelling case study of the relationship between literacy and empire in the present-day.

In this dissertation, I therefore approach the U.S.-led Afghan war and G.W.O.T. not solely as international political conflicts, but as central components of a larger imperial project – the "new imperialism" – that operates as a system of economic and cultural domination. Since the onset of the G.W.O.T., critics of the Bush and Obama administrations have shown that U.S. military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq are not simply examples of *realpolik*. They instead can be attributed to the geopolitical situation of Afghanistan and Iraq, and to their proximity to the oil reserves to which the U.S. requires access in order to maintain control of the global economy (Harvey 2003). According to the geographer David Harvey (2003), these wars are therefore linked to the underlying logic of capitalist imperialism, and serve as means of addressing, containing, and absorbing the crises of capitalist accumulation, particularly its over-accumulation crises (see also Harvey 1992). Overaccumulation occurs when both labour and capital are idle (Harvey 1992, 180); in other words, when there is a simultaneous surplus of labour and surplus of financial capital, without "any means to bring them together profitably" (Harvey 2003, 109). Harvey (2003) contends that the volatility of global capitalism since the 1970s and the current era of military intervention originate in global capitalism's attempt to find what he calls a "spatio-temporal fix" to these crises of overaccumulation (109).

From Harvey's (2003) perspective, the Afghan and Iraq wars are manifestations of global capitalism's search for new resource complexes and geographic sites for capital

investment. They thus represent attempts by global capitalism to impose capitalist relations on all areas of social life through the process that Marx (1990) called "primitive accumulation" (871) and Harvey (2003) refers to as "accumulation by dispossession" (67).[8] This form of accumulation, which Marx saw as the historical process necessary for the development of capitalism, involves the predatory opening up of new areas for accumulation through the expropriation and commodification of the lands, resources, goods, and social relations that were previously outside the realm of the market (Mooers 2006). Harvey (2003) notes that, since the mid-1970s, this form of accumulation by dispossession has occurred primarily through the neo-liberal structural adjustment policies that Western states and international financial institutions imposed on nation-states of the global south. The new imperialism therefore can be considered "new," Harvey (2003) suggests, because it relies primarily upon economic coercion, and not on the overt political and military control of foreign territories, as did older forms of empire. However, Harvey (2003) proposes that the rise of U.S. militarism post-9/11 represents a return to the territorial logic of control typically associated with the earlier stages of capitalist imperialism.[9]

I draw from Harvey's analysis of the new imperialism to suggest that the Afghan war has never been solely about exterminating Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Rather, it has also been about reconstructing Afghanistan according to a Western-defined neo-liberal

[8] For an alternative account of the military strategy of Bush and his allies, see Wood (2005). She suggests that the U.S. has lost its status as the global economic hegemon; the military violence associated with the Afghan and Iraq wars therefore should be read as attempts by the U.S. to shore up its power in the international arena and to keep its competitors in their place.

[9] For a debate over the role of state-sanctioned violence and occupation in the new form of capitalist imperialism, see the special issue of *Historical Materialism* (2006) on Harvey's *The New Imperialism*.

agenda that promotes the political and economic liberalization of the country. This agenda was outlined in the Bonn Agreement of December 2001 (which provided a plan for government restructuring), the January 2006 Afghan Compact (which focused on the private-sector-led transformation of Afghanistan), and the U.S. State Department's 2010 Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy (which outlined a neo-liberal development agenda for the country) (Kandiyoti 2007b; Chishti 2010). And, given that, as Harvey notes, the new imperialism relies primarily on economic control and does not require territorial and military control, it is not surprising that this neo-liberal reconstruction of Afghanistan also undergirds the plan developed by Western governments for the reconstruction of Afghanistan after I.S.A.F winds down its combat operations in Afghanistan in December 2014. As the 2012 Tokyo and 2014 London Conferences on Afghanistan indicate, the Western reconstruction of Afghanistan will continue throughout Afghanistan's "Transition to Transformation Decade" (2015-2024). During this decade, Western and international donor aid will remain tied to private sector investment, human capital development, and the integration of Afghanistan into regional trading blocs. The withdrawal of I.S.A.F. troops from Afghanistan therefore promises not the end of the new imperialism, but the continuation of empire by other means.

Harvey's analysis of the political economy of the new imperialism highlights the underlying logic of capitalist accumulation that guides early-twenty-first century imperialism. However, it offers few resources to account for why narratives of the literacy crisis of Afghan women have achieved such political currency in post-9/11 era or for the role these narratives have played in the processes of accumulation by

dispossession that Harvey argues are central to the Afghan war. As transnational feminism's emphasis on the mutually constitutive relationship between the economic and the cultural reveals, such an account requires that we supplement Harvey's focus on the political economy of the new imperialism with analyses of its cultural politics. Indeed, as Edward Said (1994) suggests in *Culture and Imperialism*, imperialism has always involved more than "the act of accumulation and acquisition" (9); it also has been about "ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings" (7). To fully understand the mechanisms of neo-imperial power, we must therefore take seriously the signs, metaphors, and narratives that nourish what Said calls "the sentiment, rationale, and above all the imagination of empire" (12).

It is primarily through narratives of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" that empire, once considered by Western elites to be an outdated and politically-incorrect term, has won a new respectability in the West and Western citizens have been mobilized to support the Afghan war as a grand civilizing mission (Bellamy Foster 2002; Feichtinger and Malinowski 2012). As James Der Derian, following Said, suggests, "[m]ore than rational calculation of interests takes us to war. People go to war because of how they see, perceive, picture, imagine, and speak of others: that is, how they construct the difference of others as well as the sameness of themselves through representations" (quoted in Gregory 2004, 28). Combining Said's and Der Derian's Foucauldian-inspired critique of imperial culture with the insights of other cultural critics (such as Baudrillard, Marx, and postcolonial feminists), I trace the political and cultural work that the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" accomplishes within the neo-

imperial imaginary. In particular, I examine how the construction of Afghan women as uniformly illiterate enables U.S. foreign policy and the Western mass media to cast these women as silent victims requiring saving from the figure of what Sherene Razack (2008) calls the "dangerous Muslim man" (whose illiteracy turns him into a bestial and animal-like terrorist and renders him incapable of self-governance) (5). And, following Razack, I explore how this representational regime counteractively constructs the West as a "good empire" that promotes human rights, feminism, law and order, and good governance to the rest of the world. However, I propose that the figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" is significant not solely because it legitimates the war as a civilizing and humanizing mission. Its significance also lies in how this form of imagining the difference of others and the sameness of the West operates simultaneously to regulate the Afghan woman as other and to produce Western neo-liberal forms of femininity as normative. To the extent that this figure is deployed within neo-imperial narratives to construe literacy as an exclusive property of the West and to project both patriarchy and illiteracy onto the non-West, it both enables particular opportunities for the Western-driven reconstruction of Afghan women's lives *and* justifies neo-liberal educational reforms and the shutting down of spaces for feminist politics in the West.

On the one hand, I suggest that these narratives constitute the frameworks according to which actual Afghan women have been governed and their lives reconstructed by Western military forces and international donor agencies. This project of reconstruction not only targets governance structures and promotes neo-liberal market policies, as I suggested above. It also seeks to reform gendered subjectivities and

relations. I examine how literacy, in particular, has been positioned as the key technology for transforming the figure of the immature and infantile "illiterate Third World woman," unready for self-government, into the model of the self-reliant, autonomous, and entrepreneurial subject celebrated by neo-liberal development. At the same time, I propose that the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" has served to erase histories of Afghan feminism and to thereby justify Afghan women's exclusion from democratic participation in decisions regarding what such a transformation might involve. Hence, while neo-imperial narratives of the "illiterate Third World woman" may appear to be solely cultural phenomena, I show here that they are intimately linked to the processes of accumulation by dispossession that Harvey argues characterizes the new imperialism. These narratives are therefore not simply ways of re-presenting the world. They are also ways of *intervening* in it.

On the other hand, inspired by the relational analyses developed by transnational feminism, I connect neo-imperial narratives of the plight of the "illiterate Third World woman" "over there" to what is going on "over here": to the changing political terrain of both literacy and feminist citizenship within Anglo-American states over the last two decades. From the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, adult literacy was a top funding priority of the U.S. government as panic over declining literacy rates led the U.S. and other Anglo-American states to launch a "war on illiteracy" (Wright 2001, 98). However, the passage in 1996 of Bill Clinton's *Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act* – which advocated workfare over literacy education for welfare recipients – signalled a new era of cuts to literacy programming that has continued under

the Bush and Obama administrations (Rivera 2008). These cuts have occurred against the backdrop of a larger neo-liberal political and economic agenda aimed at removing government support for affirmative action programs and social services that promote racial and gender equality, in general, and at restructuring or closing women's bureaus and ministries, in particular. For instance, as Barbara Finlay (2006) notes, while George W. Bush campaigned for the U.S. presidency by declaring that "W is for Women," in his first term as president, he used his executive powers to undo a number of feminist gains. This included eliminating gender-based policy machineries (such as the President's Interagency Council on Women and the White House Office on Women's Initiatives and Outreach), changing the enforcement of employment and pay equity policies, and redefining the mandate of the Women's Bureaus of the Department of Labour so as to remove any mention of women's rights or advocacy (Finlay 2006, 45-46).

Such attacks on the achievements of the feminist movement are not new. However, I suggest in this study that these attacks are unique because they are shrouded not in the language of outright "backlash" – as they were in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Faludi 1991) – but instead in a celebratory discourse of female success and of the advent of a "post-feminist" era (Brodie 2008; McRobbie 2007, 2009; Tasker and Negra 2007). This post-feminist discourse, as I show in Chapter One, overlaps with post-racial and homonormative discourses to construct the West as site of equality, freedom, and tolerance. As I shall argue, such decrees of equality achieved contradict the experiences of many poor and racialized people, especially single mothers of colour, who live with increased economic precarity and loss of educational opportunities as a result of these

cuts to adult education and other social services (Brodie 2008; Rivera 2008; Ruddy 2008). But, perhaps the greater paradox is that, at the same time as the U.S. cut funding for literacy initiatives and programs aimed at addressing gender inequality at home, it also launched a war abroad waged in the name of bringing literacy and women's rights to imperilled Afghan women. While the West has been portrayed as "post-feminist" – a site of sexual and gendered freedom where women's rights are supposedly respected and feminism no longer needed – Afghanistan has been portrayed as the epitome of Eastern anti-feminism – where women live under the tyranny of patriarchal customs and thus need to be assisted into gender equality.

This dissertation proposes that the concomitant hypervisibility of Afghan women's literacy crisis in the post-9/11 era and invisibility of the crisis precipitated by educational reform at home is not simply a coincidence. Rather, it underscores the extent to which neo-imperial narratives of the Taliban's misogyny and post-feminist discourses of Western sexual and gender exceptionalism must be understood as two sides of the same framework that operates to locate gender-based oppression solely in the traditional patriarchal culture of the Taliban and to portray feminism as needed "here" (in the West) only insofar as it can be exported "over there." Hence, while neo-imperial narratives pit the West against the East, this study seeks to link what has been going on in the battlefields of Afghanistan to the dramas unfolding within the West over the legitimacy of feminism as a political project. In so doing, it aims to highlight the points of connection between and among Western and Afghan gender politics that are rendered

invisible within neo-imperial narratives of the post-feminist literate West and the anti-feminist illiterate East.

One concern of this dissertation, therefore, is to challenge the Manichean divide between "the West and the Rest" produced within neo-imperial narratives. Another is to historicize the present – to link neo-imperial narratives of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World Woman" to much older colonial narratives about the obligation of the supposedly more advanced people inhabiting the imperial metropole to bring civilization to distant territories and inferior, less advanced peoples (Razack 2004). As Derek Gregory (2004) points out, these genealogies of colonial knowledge production have been used "to advance a grisly colonial present (and future)" (13). At the same time, however, such colonial legacies often have been disavowed by the U.S. and other Western governments so that the literacy crisis of Afghan women could be presented as unique to the Taliban regime and as a "state of emergency" in need of immediate foreign intervention. As Paul Gilroy (2005) astutely suggests, the new imperialism works best when the substance of colonial history and the wounds of imperial domination are forgotten, and nostalgic accounts of imperial history are instead invented that shore up the fantasy that the world is ordered according to absolute cultural and civilizational differences. This denial of colonial history produces what Charles Mills (1997) calls "white amnesia" about the historical record, which operates at the level not only of individual psychic life but also of the collective consciousness to ward off those unsettling truths about colonialism (both abroad and at "home" in white colonial settler states such as the U.S.) that threaten the narratives of innocence and benevolence so

central to the West's self-understanding (102). By mystifying the hidden edifice upon which present-day concerns are built, the new imperialism has been able to distance itself from the brutality of colonial domination, while also evoking the masks of the past – particularly that of imperialism as a grand civilizing mission – in order to dress itself up in the garb of Western supremacy and omnipotence (Butler 2004).

In the interests of challenging this colonial amnesia, I chart how older colonial concepts of both Muslim women's victimization and literacy have circulated alongside newer ones and provided the framework through which Afghan women's literacy crisis has been rendered intelligible since 9/11. Neo-imperial narratives of Afghan women's literacy crisis recast and repeat long-standing gendered and Orientalist narratives of the veiled Muslim woman as an imperiled victim of a heathen and misogynistic culture, and of imperialism as a mission of valiant Western men to rescue deprived Muslim women from their victimization by Muslim men.[10] Drawing upon and extending Said's (1987) study of how Orientalism as a body of Western knowledge defined the ontological and epistemological distinction between the "Occident" and the "Orient," postcolonial feminists have shown that, throughout the history of colonialism, ideas of gendered and sexual difference played a pivotal role in creating and maintaining such ideas of racial and civilizational difference; at the same time, ideas of "race" and civilization led to new concepts of masculinity and femininity based on "race" and place (Ware 1992; McClintock 1995; Lugones 2007). For instance, Orientalist representations of Muslim

[10] For a discussion of the role that the oppressed subaltern woman played within colonial imaginaries, see Kabani (1986); Spivak (1988); Lewis (1996); Yeğenoğlu (1998); and Kalf (1999).

women as sequestered in the seraglio or harem and forced to serve polygamous Muslim men concomitantly produced the East or the Orient as site of sexual tyranny and the West or the Occident as a site of companionate marriage and gender egalitarianism. At the same time, such representations produced racialized images of Muslim masculinities and femininities as simultaneously hypersexual and passive, dangerous and contained, and of European masculinities and femininities as civilized because they were oriented primarily to heterosexual reproductive monogyny (Kabani 1986; Yeğenoğlu 1998; Kalf 1999). Drawing from these insights, I explore how neo-imperial narratives of the Afghan woman as a victim of the Taliban's misogyny shore up images of Afghan masculinities as monstrous and of Western feminine success that simultaneously harken back to and reconfigure colonial representations of the superiority of the West's sex/gender order.

I also trace the colonial legacies of neo-imperial narratives of the dividing line between the literate and the illiterate, saviours and those in need of rescue, to the colonization of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the history of racialized slavery and anti-Black racism in the U.S., and the institutionalization of the literacy/orality divide in mid-twentieth century sociolinguistics and anthropology. I am particularly interested in how what Walter Mignolo (2003) calls the "the logic of coloniality" operated within these projects to ensure that Western alphabetic literacy was equated with civilization, progress, modernity, and humanity while "oral" and "illiterate" cultures were marked as bastions of ignorance, lawlessness, and tradition, and their peoples classified as infrahuman or inhuman (442). Within this dichotomous logic, the "oral" and the "illiterate" were always marked as subordinate terms – as symbols of lack or deficiency –

while "literacy" was posited as the superior mode of communication that all peoples and communities should seek to replicate (Graff and Duffy 2008). As I shall outline, this logic of coloniality served in the past to sanction not only regimes of terror against those deemed inhuman, but also salvation projects that promised to permit the entry of "oral" peoples into humanity through literacy education. While these salvation projects appear more benevolent than outright regimes of terror, I seek to show that salvation is itself a form of necropolitical violence that worked in tandem with terror to maintain the division between colonizer and colonized, master and slave, human and inhuman, and to legitimate the exploitation and death of those peoples without alphabetic literacy. In both past and present-day imperial projects, salvation (just as much as terror) has "dictated who may live and who must die" (Mbembe 2003, 11).

III. Feminism and the Politics of Empire

As a study of literacy's place within these colonial and neo-imperial imaginaries of domination, this dissertation contributes to the by-now large body of critical feminist scholarship on the G.W.O.T. and its colonial histories.[11] Since the onset of the G.W.O.T. and Afghan war, many feminist scholars have skillfully traced how narratives of Afghan women's plight in general, and of their oppression under the *burqa* in particular, borrowed from the representational codes that circulate within the archives of Orientalism. Such scholarship has revealed that, far from being innocuous human interest stories, these narratives constitute what Gillian Whitlock (2007) calls "soft weapons" of

[11] Representative works in this field include: Eisenstein (2004); Hunt and Rygeil (2006); Riley and Inayatullah (2006); Eisenstein (2007); Khan (2008); Riley, Mohanty, and Pratt (2008); Razack (2008); Khan (2014); and Taylor and Zine (2014).

the G.W.O.T. and exist alongside a larger assemblage of events that have come to characterize the G.W.O.T., including: the rise of the security state and the erosion of civil liberties in North America and Western Europe in the post-9/11 period (C. Bell 2011); the re-emergence of state-sanctioned torture and extra-legal detention (Razack 2008); and the rise of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism in many Anglo-American and Western European states (Arat-Koc 2005; Razack 2008).

Yet, missing from this critical feminist scholarship has been the issue of literacy. While Afghan women's literacy crisis has been a central focus of much Western media coverage and U.S. foreign policy since 9/11, it has not garnered the same critical feminist attention that has been devoted to Western representations of the *burqa* as an icon of Muslim women's oppression or to the racialized and sexualized relations of violence and torture that characterize the G.W.O.T.[12] Feminists who have addressed this topic tend either to celebrate the Bush and Obama administrations' attempts to remedy Afghan women's literacy crisis (as I mentioned above) or to condemn them as alibis for the U.S.'s geopolitical and economic interests in the region (a view I discuss in more detail in Chapter One). Few feminists, however, have interrogated the assumption that literacy is uniformly a social good or explored the role that literacy has played, not simply as a camouflage for U.S. military interventions, but as a central part of the U.S.'s war strategy.

[12] For anti-imperialist feminist analyses of neo-imperial representations of the *burqa* and hajib, see Abu-Lughod (2002); Bullock (2002); Delphy (2002); Ayotte and Hussain (2005); Stabile and Kumar (2005); Whitlock (2005, 2007); Zine (2006); and Riley (2013). For analyses of the role of sexual violence in the new imperialism, see Mohanty (2006); Eisenstein (2007); and Razack (2008).

One possible reason for this lacuna is the pride-of-place granted to literacy as a sign of modernity, enlightenment, and freedom within the social and political imaginaries of the West, in general, and of Western feminism, in particular. Female literacy historically served as a foundational tenet of much Western feminist praxis. For instance, early first-wave feminists, such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), held that the extension of female literacy was the necessary first step towards full civil and political equality for women.[13] A more expansive conception of literacy was articulated within the second-wave of Western feminism, which emerged as part of the new social movements of the 1960s and focused on eliminating gender oppression within both state institutions and everyday life. Second-wave liberal feminists challenged the traditional gendered ideologies reproduced within the literacy curriculum and fought for equal educational opportunities for girls and women (Arnot 2009). Radical and socialist feminists instead approached literacy education as a way to reclaim the silenced voices and life-stories of women who had been marginalized within institutions of formal schooling.[14]

[13] The "wave" metaphor is typically used in women's and gender studies scholarship to differentiate between the different eras of the Western feminist movement. However, it is not without its detractors. On the one hand, the wave model has been criticized for eliding intergenerational continuity between the different eras of the movement (Vickers 1992). On the other hand, anti-racist feminists argue that the wave model highlights important moments of the white feminist movement, while ignoring the activism of women of colour and indigenous women both within and outside the mainstream feminist movements that does not correspond to these temporal markers (Springer 2002; Guy-Sheftall 2002). Despite these problems, I use the term "waves" as a heuristic device to highlight some of the principal theoretical and political tendencies that are typically ascribed within women's and gender studies scholarship to different segments of Western feminist movements.

[14] For example, see Rockhill (1987); Beckelman (1988); Cox and Sanders (1988); Gaber-Katz and Horsman (1988); Horsman (1990); Lind (1990); Stromquist (1990); hooks (1993); Rockhill (1993); Atkinson et al. (1994); Haraway (1995); hooks (1995); Horsman (2000); Flannery (2005); and Moss (2008).

Since the mid-1990s, feminist scholarship on Western literacy practices has waned (Quigley et al. 2006). This decline coincides with the development of third-wave feminism: a polymorphous body of scholarship and activism that emerged as a challenge to second-wave feminism's privileging of the experiences of white, Western, middle class, and able-bodied cis-gendered female subjects, and thus to its failure to adequately address the diversity of gendered experiences.[15] In contrast to the second-wave feminist critique of female victimization, third-wave feminism instead focuses on female empowerment; the multiple identities of gendered subjects; and the pleasures of gender-variant and non-conformist subjects who queer and revision the relationship between sex and gender, bodies and identities, and thereby highlight the fluidity and instability of gender.[16] While the politics of literacy was central to what Susan Standford-Friedman (2001) calls the "temporal rhetoric of awakening, revelation and rebirth" that characterized second-wave feminism in North America, it is largely absent from the third-wave's "spatial rhetoric of location, multipositionality, and migration" (18).

Yet, despite the recent decline of feminist scholarship on literacy in the "West," the plight of the "illiterate Third World woman" remains a central concern of Western feminism today. Since the emergence of feminist development studies in the 1970s, scholars have consistently identified the gender gap between male and female literacy rates in the poorest countries of the global south as both a symptom and cause of gender oppression in these countries. While the early Women in Development (W.I.D.) literature

[15] Cis-gender refers to those people whose gender identity is consistent with the gender and sex they were assigned at birth.
[16] For overviews of the central tenets of third wave feminism, see Heywood and Drake (1997); Miles, Rezai-Rashti, and Rundle (2001); and Gillis, Howie, and Munford (2004).

portrayed female illiteracy as a cause of underdevelopment and promoted literacy as a means to integrate women into development, the shift to the Gender and Development (G.A.D.) approach in the 1990s and the "human rights" approach in the twenty-first century have raised new concerns about gender and literacy.[17] G.A.D. researchers, for instance, have highlighted the structural barriers that prevent poor women in the global south from attending literacy programs. They have also shown that literacy acquisition promotes women's freedom from traditional patriarchal constraints: their ability to choose a marriage partner, control their fertility, participate equally in their homes and communities, and organize for social change to challenge the gender division of labour. Human rights-based and capabilities approaches to development emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s in response to growing poverty in the global south. Such approaches advance literacy as a basic human entitlement that nation-states and international institutions should provide to all, particularly to girls and women (U.N.E.S.C.O. 2000). Corresponding to these innovations in feminist development studies has been the growth, since the mid-1990s, of international liberal feminist activism. Based primarily in the West, this form of international feminism aims to increase the access of poor women in poor countries to literacy and to challenge the gendered harms and violence experienced by these women as a result of local illiberal patriarchal customs and traditions that deny them equal educational opportunities (Arnot 2009; Blackmore 2009).

[17] My discussion of these developments in the feminist development studies on literacy draws from Unterhalter (2005) and Robinson-Pant (2008).

Given the place that literacy occupies within the history of Western feminism, any attempt to challenge neo-imperial narratives of Afghan women's literacy crisis threatens to call into question some of the foundational premises of Western feminism itself: namely, that "illiteracy" binds women to a life of silence and voicelessness, and that literacy is a necessary precondition for female empowerment and liberation. However, the long-standing Western feminist commitment to what Street calls the "autonomous model" of literacy has led contemporary feminist scholars and activists to ignore how literacy has served as a hallmark of imperial projects of domination, in both the past and the present-day. By failing to critically interrogate what Harvey Graff (1979, 2011) famously called the "literacy myth" – the assumption that literacy is a prerequisite for "economic development, democratic practice, cognitive enhancement, and upward social mobility" (Graff 2011, 32) – feminists risk relinquishing one of Western feminism's most cherished ideals – literacy – to this history of domination. In so doing, we miss an important opportunity to reconceptualize both literacy and our relationship to it. At the same time, we leave unquestioned those moments when feminism might collude with imperialism and repeat, not only its conceptual and political frameworks, but also the long history of Western feminism's own complicity with the projects of European colonialisms.

As feminist historians of colonialism and its aftermath have demonstrated, Western liberal feminism emerged in the context of European imperialism. Feminist historians have shown, for instance, that British women were central to the operations of British empire, especially in India. As missionaries, wives of viceroys, and travellers,

British women assumed the "burden" of saving Indian women, who were viewed by British imperial rulers as victims of uncivilized Indian men (Burton 1994). The British suffrage movement often appealed to British women's contributions to the imperial project as a rationale for their civic inclusion in political life at home. British suffragists' claim for emancipation and political citizenship was two-fold. First, they suggested that British women's emancipation was central to the well-being of empire because it would be emblematic of Britain's superiority and thus of its racial right to govern its colonies. These feminists therefore shared with male imperial leaders the view that "the degraded position of Indian women was a major indication that Indian civilization ranked below that of Enlightened Britain" (Ramusack 1990, 311; see also Burton 1994, 1998). Second, suffragists argued that British women deserved the vote because of their unique capacity to civilize and uplift suffering and degraded non-Western women (Ramusack 1990; Jayawardena 1995). As Antoinette Burton (1998) suggests, British feminists "historically relied on the injuries of 'others' to (re-) focus the attention of the state on their own desire for inclusion in the body politic" (339).

That nineteenth-century British feminism was so deeply embedded in the politics of empire provides an important reminder that, as Mrinalin Sinha proposes, "neither feminisms nor women are ever articulated *outside* macropolitical structures that condition and delimit their political effects" (quoted in Russo 2006, 559 *emphasis in original*). Any feminist project of decolonizing literacies must therefore critique not only the colonial histories of literacy and their role in present-day imperial formations. It also needs to critically examine how these colonial legacies circumscribe the possibilities for

contemporary international feminist theories of and activism on literacy, and how international feminist politics aimed at liberating the "illiterate Third World woman" might replicate the rhetoric of rescue constitutive of nineteenth-century imperial feminism.

In this dissertation, I trace the colonial logic at work in two different manifestations of contemporary international liberal feminism: Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach to international development and Deborah Ellis's children's novel *The Breadwinner*. Nussbaum's (2011) capabilities approach offers a normative political theory of social justice that outlines the minimum basic entitlements that must be made available to each person if each is to achieve truly human functioning and live a "fully human life" (78). Nussbaum positions literacy as a necessary precondition for female autonomy and flourishing, and condemns those developing countries that deny women equal access to literacy. For Nussbaum (1999), international feminism should continue the second-wave liberal feminist project of challenging "the material suffering of women who are hungry, illiterate, violated, beaten," and promoting public policy that ensures equal opportunities for human flourishing, particularly for women in the global south whose full humanity is restricted by traditional patriarchal customs and practices that bar them from participation in capitalist relations of production (44).

Ellis's (2000) *The Breadwinner*, in contrast, focuses on the heroic pursuits of a literate and exceptional Afghan girl (Parvana) who, after her father's arrest by the Taliban, lives as a boy in order to become a letter reader in the public market of Kabul and thus the breadwinner for her family. Not an illiterate or helpless feminine figure,

Parvana instead challenges traditional gender norms. On the one hand, Parvana embraces what the queer theorist Judith Halberstam (1998) calls "female masculinity" or expressions of masculinity in those with female-identified bodies. On the other hand, the child embodies the qualities of success typically associated with Western neo-liberal market-based citizenship, and is therefore positioned within the novel as capable of rescuing other "illiterate" Afghan women (Sensoy and Marshall 2010). Hence, while Nussbaum's capabilities approach centres on alleviating third world women's suffering and victimization, *The Breadwinner* is instead informed by third-wave feminism's focus on "the shared pleasures and strengths of femaleness, rather than...our shared vulnerability and pain" (Wolf 1993, 58) and its inclusion of gender-variant and trans subjects.

Yet, my aim is to show that, despite the different rhetorical strategies deployed within the capabilities approach and *The Breadwinner*, both repeat the politics of empire by portraying the West as a site of gender and sexual exceptionalism and the Western feminist as the subject best suited to save the "illiterate Third World Woman" from her traditional patriarchal culture through literacy. In Nussbaum's capabilities approach, the "illiterate Third World woman" is cast exclusively as a silenced and powerless victim of a patriarchal culture that reduces women to the status of animals; at the same time, the Western feminist is granted the epistemic and moral authority to instruct other women on how their capabilities might be best developed through their entry into capitalist modernity (Razack 2008). Although Ellis's third wave feminism celebrates third world subjects as agents rather than victims, it nevertheless portrays Parvana's literacy and

gender reversal as consequences of her parents' Western university education. In so doing, it appropriates gender-variant and trans discourses to construct a division between the West as accepting of gender variant subjects and female-to-male gender crossings and the East as defined by a hierarchal and rigid binarist gender order that sentences female subjects to a life of illiteracy, subservience, and passivity. In both, therefore, the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" demarcates the West from the Rest and serves as the foil against which Western feminism is constituted as the endpoint of feminist politics.

Yet, while I seek to expose the complicity of both second- and third-wave international liberal feminisms with empire, I further suggest that international feminists' political investment in the other woman's suffering needs to be approached not solely as evidence of their "colonialist stance" (Narayan 1997, 40). Drawing upon Freud's discussion of mourning and melancholia, I propose that it also, and perhaps more significantly, represents a melancholic response to the ascendency of post-feminist discourse in the West and to a political climate increasingly hostile to feminism. In other words, just as I connect neo-imperial narratives of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" to the changing terrain of feminist politics in the West, I also argue that international feminisms' concern with the plight of the "illiterate Third World woman" constitutes a response not only to the situation of women "over there" but to gender politics over "here" that has declared feminism passé and closed off political space for feminism in the West. And, I suggest that, just as British women's participation in empire was historically linked to their quest for suffrage at home, contemporary international feminisms' complicity with empire also results from Western feminists'

desire to re-enter the state apparatus and reclaim the political legitimacy of liberal feminism itself in post-feminist times. Put differently, I argue that we must trace international feminisms' position in relation to the rise of post-feminism in the West in order to fully understand its conceptual and political similarities with the new imperialism at this historical juncture.

IV. Literacies of Decolonization

Decolonizing Literacies therefore aims to show that in all three projects – neo-imperial, colonial, and international liberal feminist – literacy is presented as nothing more than a gift to be bestowed by benevolent Westerners on helpless "illiterates" in need of rescue. However, while I deconstruct the myth of literacy as salvation that undergirds these projects, I also want to reclaim literacy from its imbrication in the politics of empire and take it over for a different project than that to which it is currently tethered. It is for this reason that I grapple with both the promises and failures of oppositional struggles that have reconceptualized literacy as an ethico-political and pedagogical act of decolonization. Traditions of anti-colonial and postcolonial thought have sought to recover the signifying systems and multiple literacies of indigenous peoples that are rendered invisible by the autonomous model of literacy, which posits Western alphabetic literacy as the only form of literacy. However, what is at stake in these traditions is not solely the hegemony of Western alphabetic literacy and its denial of the coevality of alternative literacy practices and oral forms of communication. Rather, these traditions are primarily concerned with transforming the unequal social relations of intellectual production, pedagogy, and communication – and the attendant unequal relations of

geopolitics and economics upon which they are based and which they reproduce – that have enabled Westerners – in both the past and the present – to usurp the power and authority to define literacy and determine its presence or absence.

I focus on the attempts of two influential scholars to re-imagine literacy as a methodology and pedagogy of decolonization: anti-colonial theorist and educator Paulo Freire's theory of "critical literacy" as a "pedagogy of the oppressed"; and transnational feminist and literary critic Gayatri Spivak's theories of "transnational literacy" and "subaltern literacy" as ways of "learning to learn from below" that are open to the "imagined agency of the other," the unexpected response of students, and indigenous systems of planetary ethics and knowledge (Spivak 2003, 35). The literacies of decolonization elaborated by Freire and Spivak are marked by the historical contexts of their production and by different modes of theorizing. Emerging as part of popular-democratic struggles for decolonization, Freire's project of critical literacy challenges the colonial legacies of literacy by envisaging literacy – not as a set of technical decoding and encoding skills – but as an activity of learning to read and write the world politically: that is, as an activity of critically analyzing those relations of power and domination that structure peoples' lives in unequal and hierarchal ways. Informed by the works of Marxist-inspired, anti-colonial activist-scholars – such as Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi – Freire advances a mode of reading and writing the word and the world that takes as its departure point the agency of oppressed peoples that colonial relations of rule sought to repress. In contrast, Spivak's approaches to transnational literacy and subaltern literacy are influenced by traditions of Marxism, deconstruction, Levinas's account of the

ethical relation, and transnational feminist thought. While Freire's project of critical literacy was initially aimed at the rural poor, Spivak's account of transnational literacy targets privileged diasporic female students in the metropolitan university. It aims to challenge what Spivak views as their sanctioned illiteracy of geopolitics by highlighting how the lives of those in the global north and south are unequally constituted through, and situated in, the cross-border economic, political, and cultural processes precipitated by the latest round of capitalist globalization. Her approach to "subaltern literacy," in contrast, seeks to develop a form of collective agency amongst the subaltern in general, and subaltern girls and women in particular, that could challenge those imperial-patriarchal discourses and relations that position subaltern subjects solely as objects of rescue.

Anti-colonial thinkers tend to view Spivak's postcolonial criticism as a form of textual idealism that obfuscates both the histories of insurgent subaltern activity and the capitalist nature of imperialism and globalization (Parry 1987, 2004). In contrast, postcolonial critics challenge the binary logic of colonizer and colonized upon which anti-colonial projects rest, and suggest that the basic political categories that animated the anti-colonial left during the 20th century – revolution, socialism, and proletarian democracy – have lost their "conceptual purchase" in the "problem-space" "after postcoloniality" (Scott 1999, 134). Such entrenched and often bitter scholarly divides might explain why no study has yet compared Freire's and Spivak's theories of literacy even though both thinkers are immensely popular and influential. This dissertation departs from the existing orthodoxy that positions anti-colonial and postcolonial thought

as mutually exclusive and opposed traditions. It instead suggests that Freire's and Spivak's approaches to decolonizing literacy are complementary and that, despite the significant differences between them, the limitations of their respective projects may be best dealt with by staging a critical rapprochement between the two.

As I shall show, both Freire and Spivak seek to re-imagine literacy as a liberatory practice that can transform the hierarchies of literate/illiterate, human/infrahuman, modernity/tradition, knowledge/ignorance, and rescuer/rescued upon which the coloniality of literacy relies. However, I also suggest that, despite the insights that their theories offer to the feminist project of decolonizing literacies, both end up reproducing some of these hierarchical relations. For instance, while Freire's theory of "critical literacy" challenges the colonial inheritances of literacy, it fails to adequately address relations of gender and sexual power and reinforces the division between the human and the non-human upon which the colonial literacy/orality divide was predicated. At the same time, I shall show that Spivak's theory of transnational literacy as a mode of reading and writing the world that is accessible only to university-level students and teachers – and not to those women excluded from the subject position of the professional "intellectual" – bolsters the unequal relations of intellectual production that Freire's project of critical literacy seeks to transform.

However, while I uncover the limitations of both Freire and Spivak, I also suggest that each of their accounts of literacy requires the other. On the one hand, Spivak's approaches to transnational and subaltern literacy – which target diasporic and subaltern women respectively – offer important rejoinders to the andro-centrism that informs

Freire's vision of decolonization. At the same time, her approach to planetarity, which is informed by Levinas's ethics of the other, challenges the human/non-human division and proffers a vision of the planet as alterity, as the other from which human responsibility and obligation derives. On the other hand, Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed provides a framework for rethinking Spivak's account of transnational literacy from below. Hence, rather than pit Freire and Spivak against one another, I propose that their juxtaposition results in a more robust model for decolonizing literacies than that found in either of their works.

Taken together, their works show that literacy is not simply a set of technical reading and writing skills. It instead must be approached as political act of reading and writing the word and the world that, grounded in the epistemic and political agency of the oppressed and subaltern, is also ethics of responsibility to the alterity of that world. For them, literacy can uphold relations of domination. But, it can equally be used to render intelligible the operations of colonial and neo-imperial power and to push thinking beyond the confines of the colonial order to imagine postcolonial futures. A feminist politics of decolonizing literacies that seeks to disrupt rather than reproduce the coloniality of literacy therefore has much to learn from the promises and failures of both.

V. Chapter Overview

As is by now evident, this dissertation is an interdisciplinary project that spans that the academic disciplines of international relations, women's and gender studies, development studies, anthropology, education, communication studies, children studies, and cultural studies. It uses a variety of sources – including U.S. foreign and international

development policy documents, political speeches, Western mainstream media, literature, feminist theory, and decolonizing thought – and draws from a diverse range of theoretical traditions.

Part One, which is divided into three chapters, brings together various traditions of critique in order to facilitate the decolonization of literacy. In Chapter One, I draw from Jean Baudrillard's account of 9/11 and the West's response to it, particularly his diagnosis of the relationship between the event and the "non-event" and the fetishism of signs produced by the simulacral effects of the media; Marx's theory of fetishism; Foucault's models of biopolitics and governmentality; post-colonial feminisms; and Marxist-inspired studies of the political economy of post-war reconstruction efforts. Taken together, I use these bodies of thought to explore how and why the "literacy crisis" of Afghan women became a key U.S. administration priority and one of the most championed humanitarian causes of the U.S. and its Western military allies after their invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. My purpose in this chapter is to trace how the figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" is produced within the neo-imperial imaginary in ways that obscure the presence of Afghan women as epistemic, political, and moral agents and transform them into objects of rescue. Chapter Two combines Foucault's historical method with decolonial theory and postcolonial feminist analyses of the cultural politics of imperial representational regimes in order to link neo-imperial narratives of the "illiterate Third World woman" to representations of literacy within the colonial archive: to those texts, images, and artefacts that provide the hidden scaffolding upon which present-day claims about literacy rest. Chapter Three draws from

psychoanalytic-inspired critiques of left politics in order to further expand and develop this postcolonial feminist cultural criticism. My goal is to highlight how the history of colonial discourse is reproduced within the liberal feminist internationalism of Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach and Deborah Ellis's *The Breadwinner*. I explore, in particular, how both Nussbaum and Ellis appropriate the suffering of the "illiterate Third World Woman" in order to install the Western feminist as the one to right the wrongs of women elsewhere in the world and to resecure the political legitimacy and recognition of the liberal feminist project in a post-feminist era.

Part Two compares the literacies of decolonization developed within Freire's and Spivak's work. Chapter Four examines how Freire's account of critical literacy as a form of "liberating praxis" both draws from and breaks with traditions of anti-colonial and Marxist humanist thought. I aim to show that his approach foregrounds the agency of those classified as "illiterate," and in so doing disrupts the unequal relations of intellectual labour that inform neo-imperial, colonial, and international feminist approaches to literacy. Moreover, I shall demonstrate that Freire's theory of critical literacy also challenges vanguardist theories of social and political change and instead offers a vision of decolonization as a pedagogical project oriented toward the self-emancipation of the oppressed. Chapter Five turns to Spivak's accounts of transnational and subaltern literacy, which I read as extensions of Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed and as attempts to rethink his pedagogy through Levinas's account of the encounter with the other as event prior to knowledge and the political. I outline the changes in Spivak's account of transnational literacy as a practice of reading and writing that enables Western

academics to "unlearn…privilege as loss" – as Spivak (1990, 9) put it in *The Postcolonial Critic* – to her re-definition of both transnational and subaltern literacies as ways of "learning to learn from below" (Spivak 2003, 35). I explore what resources this form of "learning to learn" might offer the project of building transnational feminist solidarity across borders that can challenge the division between the literate/illiterate, human/non-human, knowledge/ignorance, and rescuer/rescued at the heart of neo-imperial, colonial, and international feminist projects.

The theoretical frameworks used in this dissertation are most often treated as distinct areas of inquiry, at best, or as mutually exclusive and hostile camps, at worst. This dissertation, however, engages in what Shannon Bell (1994) calls an "unfaithful reading" of these traditions (20): one that juxtaposes and recombines the insights of divergent traditions in ways that disrupt disciplinary strictures and cause damage to the original frameworks in the interests of creating a new text or meaning from the old. Such recombinant theorizing is risky, especially when done for the purpose of developing a decolonial feminist approach to literacy, as is my intention here. For instance, Baudrillard's attacks on the main strands of the second-wave of the feminist movement in *Seduction* and *America* have led some to label him an adversary to feminism (Gallop 1987), while Marxists have called him a "sign-fetishist" and read his hyperbolic parody of contemporary media culture as a nihilistic apology for the status quo (Kellner 1989, 146). Moreover, the place of Islam and Arabs in his texts, and his aligning of the Orient with the illusion and enchantment characteristic of postmodernity, have been pointed to as evidence of his Orientalism (Almond 2007). At the same time, Baudrillard's (1981)

theory of the political economy of the sign represents both an elaboration and critique of what he saw as the failure of Western Marxism to account sufficiently for the primacy of the sign in contemporary capitalist culture, while his theory of simulation sought to go beyond or "forget Foucault" (Baudrillard 2007). Moreover, although some postcolonial scholars (such as Homi Bhabha [1994]) have combined Foucauldian discourse analysis and psychoanalysis, Foucault's critique of the human sciences challenged what he saw as psychoanalysis's normalizing tendencies and its repressive hypothesis, which obscures the extent to which psychoanalysis produces the very medical conditions that it also seeks to cure. And, as I indicated above, traditions of anti-colonial and postcolonial thought also tend to be treated as antagonistic fields of scholarship.

My aim in this study is not to settle these debates. I instead read these unlikely interlocutors with and against each other because they collectively provide the framework to address how literacy has been deployed in neo-imperial, colonial, and international feminist projects to (re-) produce doctrines of Western sexual and gender exceptionalism, and how it might be instead deployed in the interests of decolonization. While this dissertation was initially motivated by the Bush and Obama administrations' appropriation of Afghan women's literacy crisis, I hope that the theoretical analyses I develop here will be applicable to contexts other than the G.W.O.T. The centrality of literacy to the Afghan war and G.W.O.T. highlights the necessity for those committed to the liberatory potential of literacy to remain vigilant for those moments when literacy becomes a *cause célèbre* in the West, and to question the political, economic, and cultural motivations that give rise to such hypervisibility. This study therefore should be of

particular concern to literacy scholars and practitioners who wish to make good on the promise that literacy can challenge social inequalities and promote social and politcal justice. But, it should also be of interest to anyone troubled by instances of suffering in general and of female suffering in particular. Indeed, while I draw attention to how literacy has been used to maintain unequal geopolitical, economic, and cultural arrangements, my intention is not to defend the unjust practice of denying women (or any one else) access to literacy and education. Rather, like Lila Abu-Lughod (2013), I want to "redirect our attention to the historical conditions and precise political configurations that lead certain forms of figurations of human suffering to become objects of earnest and widespread concern, while so many others go unremarked" (140). But I also wish to show that the ways in which suffering is imagined shape the responses to it, and that some forms of imagining re-install hierarchical relations between helper and helped that close down opportunities for ethico-political relations between differently-located subjects grounded in a recognition of the agency and radical alterity of the other.

I hope that, in contrast to this closure, this dissertation instead opens up conceptual and political space for feminists and all those committed to global social justice to resist the hegemony of narratives that position those deemed "illiterate" solely as objects of rescue. By turning to Freire's and Spivak's literacies of decolonization, my aim is to point to the possibility of cultivating a decolonial feminist politics and pedagogy of literacy grounded, not in paternalism and charity, but in diversity, collective responsibility, and love for the other beyond the self. I believe that it is only through such ethical engagement and political solidarity that feminists can begin to meaningfully

address the multiple factors that give rise to and sustain the gendered, racialized, and sexualized injustices and violences associated neo-imperial war and dispossession.

PART ONE

THE DECOLONIZATION OF LITERACY

CHAPTER ONE

THE NEW IMPERIALISM AND THE PRODUCTION OF THE "ILLITERATE THIRD WORLD WOMAN"

In October 2001, the U.S. administration of President George W. Bush and its coalition of international allies launched the G.W.O.T. against Afghanistan. This war officially began as a response to Al Qaeda's terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on 9/11. As Jill Steans (2008) notes, the immediate aftermath of 9/11 occurred within a "narrative vacuum" – the absence of storylines to account for the terrorist attacks (161). However, in the days and weeks that followed 9/11, the Bush administration and Western mass media quickly produced what Mariam Cooke (1996) calls an official "War Story" to explain the attacks.[18] This story connected Al Qaeda to Afghanistan's Taliban regime, and thereby mobilized popular assent for direct military intervention in Afghanistan, labeled by the Bush administration as "Operation Enduring Freedom."

Gendered, racialized, and Orientalist discourses and identities have been central features of this "War Story" (Hunt and Rygeil 2006). On the one hand, the Bush administration portrayed the terrorist attacks as an assault on American "values" (Razack 2008) – particularly its values of gender equality and sexual freedom – from the "terrorist/foreign fighter…who dwells in the dark corners of the earth" and threatens to undo "civilization itself, the civilization we share" (Bush quoted in Richter-Montpetit 2007, 42). On the other hand, in both the lead up to and throughout the duration of the Afghan war, the U.S. and its allies repeatedly pointed to the history of gendered violence enacted by the Islamic fundamentalist Taliban regime in Afghanistan as a rationale for

[18] See also Pettman (2004) and Hunt and Rygeil (2006).

war. In so doing, they were able to portray the "fight against terrorism" as "a fight for the rights and dignity of women" (L. Bush 2001). Indeed, despite the fact that the U.S. backed the Taliban when it seized power in Afghanistan in 1996,[19] after 9/11 the U.S. became the main critic of the Taliban regime – particularly of its edicts prohibiting women from employment and educational institutions, denying them freedom of mobility, and mandating them to wear the *burqa* when in public, as well as of its public punishments and execution of women who violated these protocols. Repeating a long history of Orientalist discourse and anti-Muslim racism that equated the veiling of Muslim women with the backwardness of "Eastern" cultures, the Bush administration and the mainstream media centered on the *burqa*, in particular, as the paradigmatic icon of the barbarism, not only of the Taliban regime, but of Islam in general and Muslim men in particular (Jiwani 2005; Russo 2006; Khan 2008). At the same time, the unveiling of Afghan women by foreign troops in November 2001 was construed as symbolic of the Afghan war's success in rescuing Afghan women from "waking nightmare" of the Taliban's rule (Bush 2001c).[20]

While such neo-Orientalist images of the *burqa* have been a focal point in Western narratives of the Afghan war, they do not stand alone. Since the outset of the war, the Taliban's denial of literacy to Afghan women has served alongside the *burqa* as a particularly privileged marker of the Taliban's "war with women" (Bush 2001b). The eradication of female illiteracy was one of the stated goals of the Bush administration's

[19] For an account of U.S. funding to the Taliban, see Gregory (2004).
[20]See Jiwani (2005); Stabile and Kumar (2005); Whitlock (2005, 2007); Riley et al. (2008); and Oliver (2010); and Riley (2013).

counter-terrorism operation in Afghanistan. In the early years of the war, both the U.S. and the U.N.-sanctioned International Security and Assistance Force (I.S.A.F.) championed the military intervention as a mission to bring literacy, which they defined as formal reading and writing skills, to women through education. Although attention to Afghan women's illiteracy has waxed and waned since 9/11, it was resurrected in those key moments when the U.S.-I.S.A.F. mission was under public scrutiny in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. (Bhattacharyya 2008; Wikileaks 2010). Moreover, after 2006, literacy became a key element of the U.S.'s counter-insurgency operations in Afghanistan. And, today, despite the Obama administration's official declaration of the end of "Operation Enduring Freedom" in December 2014, the "literacy crisis" of Afghan women remains an important justification for the U.S.'s long-term post-conflict reconstruction, aid, and development interventions in the country.

This chapter explores both *how* and *why* narratives of the "literacy crisis" of Afghan women achieved such choral uptake and political currency within the neo-imperial imaginary, and became part of what Jasbir Puar (2007) calls the "normative script" of the G.W.O.T. (37). Moreover, it asks what is at stake (semiotically, ethically, politically, and economically) in the neo-imperial appropriation of literacy. That literacy became a *cause célèbre* during the Afghan war is hardly surprising: at the beginning of the war, Afghanistan's adult literacy rate ranked amongst the lowest in the world, with only 2.8% of women, compared with 18.7% of men, classified as literate (Alvi-Aziz 2008). Yet, these low literacy rates alone cannot account for the hypervisibility of the literacy crisis of Afghan women at this historical juncture; nor does it allow us to fully

grasp the logic underlying the post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan promoted by Western governments, the U.N., and international donor agencies. Afghan feminists had organized to secure women's access to literacy education both before and after the rise of the Taliban. However, their campaigns were met mostly with Western indifference prior to 2001 (Franks 2003). That the Taliban's exclusion of women from literacy made it onto the West's agenda and became a "crisis" worthy of intervention only during the G.W.O.T. should therefore compel a critical interrogation of this recent proliferation of narratives of Afghan women's (il)literacy.

This chapter argues that the narratives of Afghan women's literacy crisis that have circulated since 9/11 are at the heart of the neo-imperial imaginary because they produce for Western popular consumption the figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman." Although this figure is not new, I explore here how it has been taken up in "new-old" ways to produce and constrain particular modes of knowing (and not knowing) Afghan women's lives, which "overdetermine from without" the Afghan woman and fix her as an "illiterate" and mute victim of the Taliban (Fanon 1967, 116).[21] This chapter's central claim is that the U.S. administration's foreign policy and development discourse and Western mainstream media invented the figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" in the post-9/11 era primarily by transforming Afghan feminist political movements for literacy into what Jean Baudrillard (2003) calls a "non-event": an object packaged and framed solely for Western audiences (34). This is not to suggest that the Taliban's misogynist exclusion of women from

[21] Eisenstein (2004) uses the concept of the "new-old" to highlight how the new is always structured through and connected to the old (39).

literacy and education is a mere fabrication of the Western imagination. Nor is it to deny that literacy remains a site of gender oppression worthy of political contest. Rather, my contention is that the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" is not commensurate with actually-existing Afghan women; it only became intelligible once Afghan women were transformed into fetishized objects of imperial knowledge and intervention, and the heterogeneity and diversity of their lives and histories of feminist activism were elided. This figure therefore can be best thought of as an "imagined subject" – a category of representation, a trope – and as distinct from what Avtar Brah (1996) refers to as "embodied, situated, historical subjects with varying and personal or collective biographies and social orientations" (131). Indeed, the paradox explored here is that at the very moment the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" became hypervisible within the neo-imperial imaginary, Afghan women became most absent – both figuratively and literally.[22]

Part of my aim is to provide an account of how this disjuncture between the imagined subject-position of the "illiterate Third World woman" and the women it claims to represent is produced within neo-imperial narratives. However, my primary concern is to trace the political and cultural work this figure accomplishes therein. While no single woman is identical to the "illiterate Third World woman," this figure is nevertheless meant to tell us something about the women it constructs as "illiterate," to convey certain messages about the superiority of the Western sex/gender order, and to bolster particular post-conflict reconstruction strategies in response to plight of Afghan women. Indeed, the

[22] See Franks (2003) and Masters (2009) for discussions of how this paradox of presence/absence structures G.W.O.T. narratives.

figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" works so well for empire because it constructs Afghan women as devoid of voice and the capacity for self-representation, and thus as helpless, silent victims in need of saving from illiterate and "dangerous Muslim men," to borrow Sherene Razack's (2008) term (5). I suggest, however, that this figure is central to the neo-imperial imaginary not solely because it transforms the G.W.O.T. and Afghan war into a rescue mission. Its significance also lies in how it serves to normalize a particular image of Western gender and sexual exceptionalism that conceals the continuing operation of gender, sexual, racial, colonial, generational, and class inequalities at "home" while simultaneously constituting the figure of the "Western woman" as a fortunate beneficiary of neo-liberal freedoms no longer in need of feminism. The "illiterate Third World woman" is just as much tied to changing norms of Western femininity, the rise of post-feminism, and the emergence of neo-liberal educational policies in Western societies, I argue, as to the G.W.O.T. and Afghan war. Moreover, I propose that the counteractive construction of the "Western woman" as "free" in comparison to the victimized "illiterate Third World woman" provides the implicit framework undergirding post-war reconstruction policies and programs in Afghanistan that aim to transform "illiterate" women into the model of the self-reliant, autonomous, and entrepreneurial subject prized by the neo-liberal approach to development. The figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" is therefore not merely a cultural construct. It also constitutes a "dense transfer point for relations of power" through which the lives of female subjects, both at home and abroad, are governed in the present-day (Foucault 1990, 103).

My approach differs from, yet should be read as a complement to, those feminists who have sought to recuperate the political visibility of Afghan women in order to challenge their strategic erasure within the neo-imperial imaginary – a project requiring attention to the class, geographic, and ethnic differences between and among Afghan women (Kandiyoti 2007b) and to what Zillah Eisenstein (2004) calls "other-than western cores of feminism" (194). While such a politics of recuperation is necessary, my aim in this chapter is to instead "undo" the very figure of the "illiterate Third World woman," revealing it to be constructed through and for relations of power and domination. This approach is required because it is here that we uncover the insidious and often invisible manifestations of imperial power at work in a representational project that serves as the "common sense" (Gramsci 1971, 232) or "political unconscious" (Jameson 1983) of the new imperialism. Yet, it is also necessary because any affirmative feminist politics of recovering the voices of Afghan women is always constrained by, and exists in tension with, imperial-patriarchal discourses of the "illiterate Third World woman" that define and frame how the lives of Afghan women have been made (in)visible within the neo-imperial imaginary. Hence, while my goal in this chapter is not to recover the silenced and marginalized voices of Afghan women, I hope to contribute to such a political agenda by challenging the very edifice of an imperial project that has rendered such voices and knowledge silent and inaudible the first place.

I. Hypervisibility and the Creation of a Crisis

In the aftermath of 9/11, visual and textual representations of Afghan women's victimization at the hands of the Taliban regime proliferated in the foreign policy

discourse of the Bush administration and the Western mainstream media as the Afghan war was packaged as a mission to save Afghan women from the Taliban (Hunt and Rygeil 2006; Russo 2006).[23] Bush's major public addresses and U.S. State department documents after 9/11 reveal the extent to which narratives of Afghan women's literacy crisis, in particular, bolstered the official "War Story" of the G.W.O.T. as a war for women. In his 20 September 2001 call to war, for instance, Bush (2001a) connected the terrorist attacks of 9/11 – which were committed by a terrorist network that moves across the borders of at least 60 states – to the Taliban by highlighting the Taliban's denial of education to Afghan women: "[i]n Afghanistan, we see al Qaeda's vision for the world. Afghanistan's people have been brutalized…Women are not allowed to attend school" (Ayotte and Husain 2005; Hawkesworth 2005; Russo 2006). By November 2001, the focus of the Bush administration's foreign policy discourse had shifted almost exclusively to the Taliban. For instance, the U.S. State department's (2001) "Report on the Taliban's War Against Women" contains no references to al Qaeda; it instead outlines the myriad manifestations of the "Taliban's mistreatment of women" and calls for U.S. intervention to rescue Afghan women. First Lady Laura Bush's (2001) "Weekly Radio Address" on 17 November, 2001 echoed the report's findings by stressing that "the Taliban regime has cruelly reduced women and girls to poverty, poor health, and illiteracy." Recycling this trope of Afghan women's victimization, U.S. mainstream media also replicated this gendered "War Story" in its coverage of the Afghan war.

[23] As Stabile and Kumar (2005) suggest, while the situation of Afghan women received a minimal amount of Western media coverage in the year prior to 9/11 (i.e. 33 broadcast programs), in the four months after 9/11 there were 628 broadcast programs and 93 newspaper articles on the situation of Afghan women in the U.S. mainstream media.

Emblematic of this trend is a 2002 *New York Times* article, entitled "Long in Dark, Afghan Women Say to Read is Finally to See." Linking the *burqa* to the exclusion of Afghan women from literacy education under the Taliban, the article depicts Afghan women during the Taliban's rule as "silent, shadowy figures in public," "dressed in the all-encompasing burka," "too timid to approach strangers," and as "blind" and "without knowledge" as consequence of their illiteracy (Gall 2002, A26).

Since the outset of the G.W.O.T., Western feminist response to this hypervisibility of Afghan women's literacy crisis has been divided. Liberal feminists, on the one hand, have lauded this recent focus on the Taliban's misogynist policies (Hunt 2006). In the early years of the war, veteran feminist Barbara Ehrenreich (2003), for instance, suggested that, despite the insecurities produced for women as a consequence of war, "[f]eminists can take some dim comfort from the fact that the Taliban's egregious misogyny has finally been noticed" (189). Other liberal feminists, such as the U.S. Feminist Majority Foundation (F.M.F.) and the Canadian group Women for Women in Afghanistan (C.W.4.W.Afghan), have been more openly celebratory, heralding this hypervisibility as evidence that mainstream media and policy makers are finally taking seriously "gender apartheid" after years of feminist campaigns to make visible the regime of gender violence in Afghanistan – of which the denial of literacy and education is one manifestation (Hunt 2006; Russo 2006).[24]

[24] In 1997 F.M.F. and other U.S. human rights organizations initiated a "Stop Gender Apartheid in Afghanistan" campaign to influence U.S. policy on the Taliban (Choudhury 2009). The campaign was successful in preventing the U.S. and the U.N. from recognizing the Taliban as the official government of Afghanistan, stopping U.N.O.C.O.L. from building a gas and oil pipeline in the country, and fundraising for Afghan refugee women (Hunt 2006; Russo 2006). However, before 9/11, the F.M.F.'s demands to censure Taliban leaders for their violations of women's

By contrast, anti-imperialist feminists openly criticized the Bush administration for its self-serving appropriation of feminist rhetoric in order to package the G.W.O.T. as a mission to liberate women, and the F.M.F. and C.W.4.W.Afghan for their complicity with the Bush agenda. These critics interpret the hypervisibility of Afghan women post-9/11 as a camouflage for military intervention, a disguise for the history of the U.S.'s support of the Taliban, and a "decoy" for its foreign policies and economic interests.[25] For instance, Russo (2006) suggests that the hypervisibility of Afghan women's suffering under the Taliban in the post-9/11 era has served to direct public attention toward affective economies of moral outrage and away from the history of U.S. support for the Taliban – both during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979 (when the U.S. provided military and financial support for the *Mujahideen* resistance against both the Soviets and the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan [P.D.P.A.]) and when the regime came to power in 1996 after the fall of the P.D.P.A. in 1992 and a civil war amongst various *Mujahideen* factions (1992-1996). Evocations of the "literacy crisis" of Afghan women elide the long history of political conflict over female literacy in

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human rights were ignored by the U.S government and international community (Cornell 2004). The mandate of C.W.4.W.Afghan includes bringing humanitarian relief – particularly education, literacy, and teacher training – to Afghan women and educating the Canadian public and government on the situation of Afghan women (M. Butler 2009). However, while the F.M.F. positions itself in relation to what Mohanty (2006) calls the U.S. self-image as "a benevolent, 'civilized' white paternal nation bringing democracy to rest of the world" (10), C.W.4.W.Afghan is informed by a specifically Canadian national narrative of equality, racial innocence, and multiculturalism. This is exemplified in the claim that it "represents a true Canadian passion for respecting diversity and equality, empowerment of women, and being actively involved in meeting our global responsibilities" (C.W.4.W.Afghan 2006a, 4) and in its celebration of Canada's historic role as a peacekeeping nation. Both organizations welcomed the attention to Afghan women's plight in the post-9/11 era and supported the Western military intervention in Afghanistan to overthrow the Taliban, even as they critiqued the failure of the I.S.A.F. to achieve full gender equality for Afghan women.

[25] See, for instance, Hunt and Rygeil (2006); Eisenstein (2007); and Eisenstein (2009).

Afghanistan, which predates the Taliban regime's repressive and patriarchal policies forbidding literacy education to girls and women, and which demonstrates how Afghan women's lives have been regulated and controlled by various tribal patriarchies, local colonial elites, and imperial forces (i.e. the Soviets) throughout the 20th century.[26] Neo-imperial narratives also hide the West's implication in and responsibility for creating the conditions under which girls and women were denied literacy under the Taliban regime and thus for its support of the very fundamentalist regime that since 9/11 has been decried as waging a war against women (Jiwani 2005; Russo 2006; Zine 2006). For anti-imperial feminists, such strategic silences highlight the hypocrisy underlying the claim that the G.W.O.T. is a battle for women's literacy, and reveal the extent to which feminist rhetoric has functioned to conceal the real strategies and policies motivating Western intervention – such as the U.S.'s attempt to build an oil pipeline through Afghanistan and to thereby gain access for U.S. corporations to Caspian Sea oil (Rashid 2000; Eisenstein 2004; Stabile and Kumar 2005).

Anti-imperialist feminists rightly draw attention to what neo-imperial narratives of Afghan women's illiteracy erase and occlude, and thus offer an important challenge to the liberal feminist celebration of the hypervisibility of Afghan women's plight in the

[26] Literacy education for Afghan women has long been a site of political contest in the county. Alongside a history of social reforms developed by colonial elites that aimed to educate Afghan women in urban centres (such as educational reforms in the 1940s that led to establishment of a secondary school for women in Kabul and the policies of the Marxist People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan [1978-1992], which entrenched female literacy in law and ordered compulsory literacy programs in rural areas), there is also a concomitant history of backlash against these reforms that originated first in rural areas and then in refugee camps in Pakistan, where tribal patriarchies sought to control gender relations, kinship arrangements, and women's lives (Moghadam 1993, 2005; Ahmed Gosh 2003; Khan 2008, 2014). The overthrow of the Soviet-backed PDPA in 1992 and the subsequent civil war also reduced access to education for women, particularly in rural areas (Khan 2014).

post-9/11 era. However, I want to supplement this anti-imperialist critique of the occlusionary effects of these narratives, with one that explores another crucial dimension of hypervisibility: its "productive power."[27] In what follows, I trace how the excessive or exaggerated visibility created by the constant recycling of tropes of Afghan women's literacy crisis has operated to install a vivid set of images, derived from repeated stereotypes, that take on a reality of their own by virtue of their reiteration. To be sure, the Taliban's regime of gender oppression produced a literacy crisis for Afghan women. However, neo-imperial narratives do not offer the unmediated, transparent, and incontrovertible evidence of Afghan women's victimization that liberal feminists suggest. Nor are they solely ruses for imperial power. They instead constitute their object – the monolithic figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate" victim of the Taliban – through the particular frames and scripts produced by the narratives themselves. As Judith Butler (2009) notes, the "frames of war" deployed by state and media discourses do not self-evidently represent the real; they are "ways of carving up experience" that "contain, convey, and determine what is seen" and "give definite organization to its content" (10). To fully account for what these narratives accomplish for the G.W.O.T. and Afghan war therefore requires that we trace how these "frames of war" operate as forms of power to filter and organize the visible so as to foreground, through a kind of "forceable exposure," certain aspects of Afghan women's lives while sentencing others to oblivion (J. Butler 2009, 29).

[27] In this chapter, I borrow the term "productive power" from Razack (2007, 4).

This is especially the case since the G.W.O.T. and Afghan war have been "carried out not only in the hills of Afghanistan but also on television screens in the U.S., Europe and Asia" (Shipiro quoted in Steans 2009, 162). As W.T.J. Mitchell (2011) suggests, while military historians traditionally distinguished between two histories of war – the history of what happened in war and the history "what was said to justify, explain, and narrate it" – "[t]he difference is that, in our time, both the things done and things said are filtered through the mass media, and the role of images and the imagination is…much expanded" (xi). In other words, in the present-day, the tactics and strategies of war cannot be separated from their mediated representations (J. Butler 2009). Moreover, as Baudrillard's famous account of media simulacra suggests, the globalized information technologies and real-time media/news/information through which the perception of war is mediated simulate the real, rather than re-present it, and constantly produce copies of the "real" without origin (Merrin 2005; Bishop 2009). When one of Bush's key political advisors told journalist Ron Suskind that the U.S. "is an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality," he was expressing the hubris underlying the myth of the U.S.'s self-production (Suskind quoted in Mitchell 2011, xviii). Yet, as Mitchell (2011) suggests, his conceit also reveals something novel about contemporary wars: they take place, in part, within the realm of the media simulacra, which implodes the division between "reality" and "image," and creates a new order of simulation, what Baurdrillard refers to as the "hyperreal," characterized by the reproduction and proliferation of self-referential signs and spectacles (Merrin 2005).

Baudrillard's account of media hyperreality matters to this study of the hypervisiblity of Afghan women's literacy crisis within the neo-imperial imaginary for several reasons. In the first place, it offers an important reminder that the images and narratives of Afghan women's plight that have circulated within and across the global mediascape in the post-9/11 era are neither true nor false but both at the same time. Since hyperreality collapses the very distinction between sign and referent, copy and original, lies and the truth, it makes the object appear simultaneously "more real than the real" and "more false than the false" because "the very excess of its appearance" is productive of a different order of the real in which signs are understood only in relation to other signs and not to the "real world" (Baudrillard 2001b, 157, 160; Merrin 2005; Tofolleti 2007). In the second place, and perhaps more importantly, Baudrillard (1998) provides a framework for understanding how the media's framing and production of reality transform "the lived, unique, eventual character of the world" (123) – events as they are lived and produced by their participants with historical significance and meaning – into "non-events" that are packaged into an objects for consumption "analogous to the finished objects of industrial production" (Baudrillard 1999, 92; Merrin 2005).

According to Baudrillard (1999), the hyperreal not only generates "pseudo-events," such as advertising, that are planned and dramatized solely for the purposes of being reported and disseminated to audiences. Rather, Baudrillard holds that all events become "non-events" as they enter the hyperreal simulacra of the media (Merrin 2005). Baudrillard explains that as the event is filtered through the continuous cycle of the media, it is "cut adrift by its own image" (quoted in Merrin 2005, 74). The image

captures or "takes the event hostage," and endlessly multiplies and refashions it according to other signs and images already in circulation, producing a general equivalence or exchangeability between and among them (quoted in Merrin 2005, 102). William Merrin (2005) points out that this usurpation of the event by the media image marks a radical shift in our experience and perception of events and happenings. "While in earlier times an event was something that happened," Baudrillard claims that now events occur only "as a virtual artefact, as a reflection of pre-existing media defined forms" (quoted in Merrin 2005, 67). Echoing Walter Benjamin's (1968) observation that in an age of mechanical reproduction the work of art loses its authenticity and originality as it enters into mass circulation, Baudrillard similarly suggests that as every image becomes a simulation of the other on the screen, the event loses its singularity and "aura" (the uniqueness and distance necessary for critical thought and symbolic exchange) (Merrin 2005). As a consequence, each mediated event offers "only an experience of *déjà vu*" (Baudrillard 2003, 34): it produces "the strange aftertaste of something that has already happened before, something unfolding retrospectively" (quoted in Merrin 2005, 71). Emptied of historical significance and trapped in what Paul Virilio (1997) calls the journey of the "eternal present" (133), the event is ultimately rendered banal and disappears such that it appears to not have happened.[28] It becomes a "non-event."

For Baudrillard (2003), the G.W.O.T. and Afghan war contain properties of the "non-event." They repeat older models of war, particularly of the first Persian Gulf War

[28] While some critics read Baudrillard's theory of the non-event as a form of idealism that denies the existence of the physical world, his account of the non-event instead focuses on the problem of how the event is produced in and through the media (see Merrin 1994, 2005).

(1990-91). Moreover, the "fantastic news" and "useless propaganda" that have circulated as part of the G.W.O.T. generate a simulated spectacle of war (34), which, as he puts in a different context, "neutralize[s] that lived and unique character of actual world events [the terrorist attacks] by replacing them with a multiple universe of mutually reinforcing and self-referential media" (Baudrillard 1999, 89).[29] It is important to reiterate here that calling the G.W.O.T. and Afghan war "non-events" is not to deny the violence they have produced. It is instead to suggest that, to the extent that Western audiences experience them only on the screen, these wars become "pure media events"; this process of hyperrealization thus annuls their power to disturb such that even "the dead are no longer seen to matter" (Hegarty 2004, 62).

Baudrillard is silent on the gendered, sexualized, and racialized dimensions of these wars. I suggest, however, that the images of Afghan women's bodies and narratives of their literacy crisis that have been broadcast in television newscasts and documentaries, depicted on the covers of magazines and life narratives, and spoken about at the press conferences of Western political leaders with incessant repetition since 9/11 are products of this simulated hyperreality of "banal images" and "spurious events," of this transformation of the event into the "non-event." Not only are they part and parcel of

[29] Baudrillard (2003) argues that 9/11 "resurrected both images and events" because it constituted a "pure event": a singular and symbolic event irreducible to, and disruptive of, the simulated system of signs that characterizes media hyperreality (27, 4). According to Baudrillard (2003), the symbolic dimensions of the attack are multiple. First, the terrorists targeted a symbol of U.S. hegemony: the twin towers. Second, the terrorists used the West's own globalized communication and information technologies to disseminate images of this symbolic violence; in doing so, they harnessed the audience's desire – as expressed in its consumption of mainstream films – to view the superpower's destruction. Third, the terrorist attacks used the weapon of a sacrificial-suicidal death, which he argues cannot be reduced to pre-existing media images. See also Hegerty (2004); Merrin (2005); and Gane (2007).

the "perpetual spin" and the "endless drip-feed...of 'Breaking News' bulletins" that has characterized media productions of the G.W.O.T. (Rubenstein 2008, 152). Their status as "non-events" also stems from how they capture what Baudrillard (1994, 56) calls the "pulsing of events" – such as the Taliban's denial of literacy to women and Afghan feminist political movements against this exclusion – and package and filter their meaning in and through Western scripts of "third world difference" (Mohanty 1991, 72).

This eradication of the event by the "non-event" becomes especially evident when we explore the differences between the way the issue of female literacy has been articulated within feminist movements in Afghanistan and how it has been framed by U.S. foreign policy discourse and the mainstream media since 9/11. Afghan feminists struggled for decades prior to 2001 to secure girls and women's access to literacy education. While Afghan feminism is a plural and diverse movement, rooted in varying traditions of secularism and Islam,[30] R.A.W.A. (the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) is perhaps the most well-known feminist organization in Afghanistan.[31] R.A.W.A.'s activism around girls' and women's access to literacy education can be traced to its establishment in 1977, a year before the *coup d'ètat* by the P.D.P.A. and the subsequent Soviet occupation of the country in 1979 (Mansoor 2002).

[30] For discussions of some of the differences within Afghan feminism, see Mehta (2002).

[31] I acknowledge that R.A.W.A. is largely a middle class, urban social movement, composed of highly educated women, and that, as Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai (2002) note, the attention devoted to this group within Western feminist scholarship "erases other women's groups in the region, ignores the relative privilege and access of resources that R.A.W.A.'s members have in relation to the majority of women in Afghanistan, and obscures the network of regional and international political and economic interests that govern such organizations" (130). R.A.W.A. therefore does not occupy a privileged position in my analysis. I briefly outline its work solely because it provides an important contrast to the way in which Afghan women's literacy is portrayed in the neo-imperial imaginary.

Long-time critics of Islamic fundamentalism, with the rise of the Taliban in 1996, R.A.W.A. began organizing underground schools for girls and women in both Afghanistan and refugee camps in Pakistan. These feminists connect their struggle for literacy to demands for women's economic, social, and physical security.[32] Furthermore, while they link the Taliban's denial of literacy and education for girls and women to its fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, they do not reduce this abrogation of women's rights solely to religious fundamentalism or to the patriarchy of Afghan tribal society (R.A.W.A. 2001, 2002). Instead, Afghan feminists have sought to demonstrate the relationship of local and national structures of gender subordination (including not simply the Taliban but also the corruption of the post-invasion Karzai regime [2004-2014] and of the warlords) to those multiple patterns of domination and subordination – such as global economic structures and U.S. foreign policy – that Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) call the "scattered hegemonies" of postmodernity.[33]

This partial history of Afghan feminism belies the notion that Afghan women are only victims, and highlights instead the multiple ways in which women remain agents even in extremely repressive moments of patriarchal and imperialist oppression (Rostami-Povey 2007a, 2007b).[34] My contention, however, is that once the literacy crisis

[32] See for instance, Ahmed-Gosh's (2006) interview with Islamic Afghan feminists.

[33] As R.A.W.A. member, Weeda Mansoor (2002), points out, the abrogation of women's rights in Afghanistan "comes with the sanction of the so-called civilized world, which has empowered, and which continues to empower, our oppressors" (69). She notes, for instance, that both those factions of the anti-Soviet *Mujahideen* bands that now constitute the Northern Alliance and the Taliban were equipped and funded by the U.S. and its allies as part of its Cold War strategy against the U.S.S.R., and that both are responsible for numerous violations of Afghan women's rights, including rape, abduction, forced prostitution, and murder. See also Khan (2008, 2014).

[34] I am not positing some authentic and self-transparent female subject of third world resistance. Nor am I appealing to a naive notion of experience as unmediated and uncontestable. Since the

of Afghan women became a "border-crossing" issue in the post-9/11 era (Narayan 1997, 87) – that is, once it was "dislocated" from the contested histories and politics of its production; travelled across the deterritorialized, asymmetrical, and overlapping "mediascapes" through which information and ideas flow in a new era of globalization; and entered the postmodern simulacra in which it circulates as a "free-floating" sign (a sign without referent) (Ghosh 2001, 42) – this vibrant history of Afghan feminism was transformed into its opposite: a spectacle of female victimization in which the Afghan woman figures only as an "illiterate Third World woman" bereft of agency. In other words, it was turned into a "non-event." And, just as Baudrillard argues that the non-event is filtered through and reproduces a repertoire of signs and images that absorb and displace the event, the figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" similarly gains its meaning, not in relation to "real" women, but instead to pre-existing Western discourses on "Third World women." Within such self-referential discourses, as Valentin Mudimbe (1988) points out, "stories about Others, as well as commentaries on their differences, are but elements in the history of the Same and its knowledge" (28).

II. The "Illiterate Third World Woman" as Non-Event and Fetish

The figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" has a long history that predates the Afghan war. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) observes, "under Western eyes" illiteracy historically served as one item in a network of signs – such as "sexually-

1980s, many feminists have criticized the project of founding a feminist epistemology on experience, and have argued instead that feminists must explore the historical and discursive production of experience (Haraway 1991; Scott 1992; Stone-Mediatore 1998). Here, I follow Avtar Brah (1996) and Lata Mani (1998) in suggesting that one can acknowledge how subjects negotiate regimes of power and exercise agency, without reifying and naturalizing experience.

constrained...ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc" (22) – that together constitute an ahistorical and monolithic stereotype: the oppressed "Third World woman" as victim of a timeless traditional patriarchal culture unique to the "Third World" (and typically envisioned under the rubric of "Islam"). This representational regime combines colonial and racial discourses of "third world difference," non-Western backwardness, primitiveness, and underdevelopment with heteropatriachal discourses of feminine passivity, submissiveness, and weakness to produce the hyperfeminine image of women in the third world as uniformly oppressed and imperilled.

Mohanty draws attention to, but leaves unelaborated, the centrality of "illiteracy" to Western discourse on the "Third World woman." Recent feminist scholarship has extended Mohanty's account of how the composite category of the "Third World woman" operates as a form of discursive colonization and exercise of power. These scholars trace how educational and development discourses deploy the autonomous model of literacy – a model that, as I indicated in the introduction, posits "illiteracy" exclusively as "lack" – to construct the "illiterate Third World woman" as "other" and to obscure the epistemic and political agency of the women subsumed under this category. Such discourses operate through a dichotomous and hierarchical logic that not only separates the "literate" from the "illiterate," but also establishes and defines the literate self as the normative term (Brodkey 1991; Chopra 2004). Within such discourses, the "illiterate Third World woman" is therefore posited exclusively as powerless, underdeveloped, and lacking the knowledge and skills necessary to contest male

dominance due to her illiteracy and location in the "Third World" (Chopra 2004, 2011; Robinson-Pant 2004; Sato 2004).[35]

In the post-9/11 era, this repository of tropes, images, and scripts has served as the framework through which the literacy crisis of Afghan women has been rendered intelligible to Western audiences. For instance, in the early years of the Afghan war, Bush's public addresses and the mainstream media rarely depicted Afghan women as historical subjects or agents who had long organized their political activism around female literacy (Shepherd 2006; Steans 2009). In contrast to Afghan feminists' self-representation as epistemic, moral, and political agents, a different narrative emerged after 9/11: one in which bits and pieces of Afghan feminist discourse – including its critique of the denial of literacy to Afghan women – were transposed into a self-referential conceptual universe in which Afghan women could appear only as oppressed, invisible, and mute "illiterates," sentenced by the Taliban, as one journalist put it, to an "ignorance [that] proves more oppressive than the all-covering burka" (Aigotti 2002, A6). When Afghan women have appeared within neo-imperial narratives as epistemic subjects, their knowledge claims have been typically circumscribed by a narrative framework that posits their victimization and objectification at the hands of Afghan men as given. For instance, while quotes by Afghan women are interspersed throughout the U.S. State Department's 2001 "Report on the Taliban's War Against Women," their voices are deployed only as evidence of their status as illiterate victims. For instance, a

[35] This parallels how women in the global south are marked as "other" within development discourse more generally. See Escobar (1995); Saunders (2002); Chowdhry (2005); Pettman (2005); and Rai (2013).

section of the report entitled "And in Their People's Words" contains a quote by 35-year-old Kabul resident, Nasima: "When we are together, everyone here is talking about how the Taliban has destroyed our lives. They won't let us go to school because they want us to be illiterate like them" (U.S. State Department 2001). This deployment of Nasima's voice is worth noting, not because it offers a critique of the Taliban's denial of literacy and education to women, but because her presence within the document is only as an informant for the U.S: her role is to offer proof of Afghan women's illiteracy, confirm for the West the Taliban's primitivism and backwardness, and thereby affirm the humanitarian premise of the Afghan war as a mission to save "brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1988, 297; Cooke 2002; Maira 2009). Disappeared from the report are the stories of Afghan women's survival of decades of "war, militarization, and starvation," which neo-imperial narratives, such as the one that informs the State Department report, construct "as less injurious to women than the lack of education, employment, and...Western dress styles" (Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002, 345; Russo 2006).

The above passage by Nasima is also noteworthy because of the way it connects Afghan women's literacy crisis to the illiteracy of Afghan men. Although in the post-9/11 era the Bush and Obama administrations and the Western mainstream media have focused almost exclusively on high rates of illiteracy amongst Afghan women, at times they have also pointed to the illiteracy of Afghan men to explain the need for foreign military and development interventions in Afghanistan. If the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" serves within the neo-imperial imaginary as evidence of Afghan women's hyperfemininity, male illiteracy is instead deployed to establish the queer and

perverse racialized masculinities embodied by Afghan men: while the illiteracy of Taliban fighters is presented as a symbol of their bestial natures and the cause of their violent hypermasculinity[36] – a wild and brutish masculinity that poses a threat to the security of both Afghan women and the West – the illiteracy of other Afghan men is often taken as evidence of a failed masculinity that renders such men incapable of self-governance.

Bush's address to the Global Conference on Literacy in the fall of 2006, for instance, referred to illiteracy among Afghan men as the cause of the "hopelessness" that breeds violence against Afghan women and the terrorism that empowers irrational and dangerous men "to take innocent life to achieve an objective." Illiterate men, according to Bush, are therefore at the root of "the spread of radicalism." In contrast to this vision of the illiterate Afghan male as fanatical terrorist, the Obama administration has cast male illiteracy as the primary reason for the failure of the members of the Afghan army and police to achieve regional security (CBS 2009). For the Obama administration, male illiteracy provides evidence of Afghanistan's childlike and effeminate status in relation to the U.S. and I.S.A.F., its incapacity to exercise the sovereign right of self-government, and thus the continuing need for U.S. military operations in Afghanistan after the official end of the war in December 2014. Yet, whether the illiterate Afghan man is imagined as a hypermasculine terrorist that threatens to violate the "illiterate Third World woman" or as an effeminate Afghan man who is unable to protect her from harm, U.S. foreign policy

[36] For a discussion of how the Bush administration and Western mass media used the "beast" metaphor to depict the Taliban as wild, fierce, dangerous, and repugnant and thus as in need of extermination, see Steuter and Wills (2008).

discourse marks him exclusively as uncivilized and barbarous, and thereby equates him with a figure that Sherene Razack (2008) agrues has come to dominate the narrative terrain of the G.W.O.T.: the "dangerous Muslim man" (5).[37]

Such narratives of the helpless "illiterate Third World woman" and the "dangerous Muslim man" also circumscribe the Western representations of Afghan feminism that have circulated since 9/11. From the outset of the Afghan war the Taliban's attacks on R.A.W.A.'s underground schools for women in Afghanistan and refugee camps in Pakistan have served "global icons" of the Taliban's "war against women" (U.S. Department of State 2001).[38] However, R.A.W.A.'s literacy campaign has been repeatedly referred to by the U.S. government and mainstream media to reinforce, not the agency of feminists, but the pre-scripted story of the Taliban's barbarity in not only outlawing literacy education for women but also exiling and stifling the free expression of the very feminists who have fought for such education.[39] Such narratives work by isolating R.A.W.A.'s critiques of the Taliban's patriarchal and fundamentalist interpretation of Islam from its concomitant critiques of U.S. and Western foreign policy and imperial intervention (Stabile and Kumar 2005). Within these narratives, the literacy

[37] Such contradictory depictions of Afghan men are not unique to the G.W.O.T. As Loomba (1998) points out, within the colonial period, the "Oriental man was effeminised, portrayed as homosexual, or else depicted as villain" who uses women as chattel (152). See also Kabani (1986), Puar (2007), and Manchanda (2015).

[38] I borrow the term "global icons" from Ghosh (2011).

[39] See Yasmin Jiwani (2005) for a discussion of how representations of R.A.W.A. within the Canadian national newspaper *The Globe and Mail* emphasized the victim status of Afghan women while simultaneously downplaying feminist activism and the variety of geopolitical and economic factors that contribute to women's subordination in Afghanistan. See Jill Steans (2009) for an analysis of the Bush administration's use of R.A.W.A. as an exemplar of Afghan women's victimization at the hand of the Taliban and of the refusal by members of R.A.W.A. to conform to such stereotypes of Afghan women as submissive and passive.

crisis of Afghan women is instead turned into an ahistorical and timeless verity, and the seemingly unified and timeless "culture" of Afghanistan and its "illiterate" men are cast as the culprits and origins of women's violation (Khan 2008). Culturalist explanations of gender relations, as Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) explains, elide the political and historical causes of gender oppression, illiteracy, and the global interconnections between nation-states (see also Narayan 1997; Razack 2008). But they also end up portraying Afghan women, including those who self-name as feminist, as "not yet" or "not-quite" subjects because their cultural conditions bar them from practising feminist principles and from self-determination, which Western political and media discourse construes as preconditions for the exercise of agency (Hua 2006, 236). Within such neo-imperial narratives, then, Afghan feminists – regardless of their political activism or level of technical literacy skills – are constructed solely as victims of the Taliban, and thus are reduced to and submsumed by the figure of the helpless and silenced "illiterate Third World woman."

The paradox of neo-imperial narratives of Afghan women's literacy crisis is therefore that, while they co-opt Afghan feminist critiques of the Taliban's denial of literacy to women and make hypervisible their plight, they simultaneously foreclose the presence of Afghan women as historic and epistemic agents. They instead re-install predictable representations of the "illiterate Third World women" as defined by deficiency, inferiority, and lack. As a consequence, not only do such representational regimes have the structure of the *déjà vu* that Baudrillard suggests characterizes the "non-event": everything that appears novel or different is merely a repetition or simulation of

what came before. The excessive visibility created by the constant repetition of such representations within the neo-imperial imaginary also means that, although the lives of Afghan women can never be fully captured by the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" without remainder, this figure nevertheless has become "so naturalized, so pushed by the momentum of its ubiquity, that it seems to be reality" (Lubiano 1992, 329). Functioning in the neo-imperial imaginary as "name of familiarity that closes off the need for further knowledge" (Gordon 2005, 2-3), this figure appears to convey the truth of Afghan women's lives. As a consequence, representations of Afghan women not linked to illiteracy have become almost inconceivable in the post-9/11 era.

The figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" thus can be best thought of as a fetish that, abstracted from the real, comes to function as a substitute for it. Baudrillard (2001a) explains this mode of production of the fetish as follows: "initially, the real object becomes a sign: this is the stage of simulation. But in a subsequent stage the sign becomes an object again, but now not a real object: an object much further removed from the real than the sign itself...a fetish" (129). In *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, Baudrillard (1981) traces the origin of the word "fetish" to the Portuguese *feitiço*, which means "artificial" (91). According to Baudrillard, the fetish is therefore first and foremost "a *fabrication*, an artifact" (91), which is "emptied of its concrete substance of labour and subjected to another type of labour, a labour of signification, that is, of coded abstraction" (93). For Baudrillard (1981), the "fascination" exercised by the fetish object thus stems, not from its magical properties or "use-value," but rather from

how it embodies a "generalized code of signs, a totally arbitrary code of differences" (91).

There cannot be any doubt about the artifice of the "illiterate Third World woman." Yet, while I have suggested that this figure exists independent of any external reference, it would be a mistake to view the "illiterate Third World woman" solely as the product of an arbitrary system of what Baudrillard (1981) calls "sign-values" (112). As Marx's (1978a) account of commodity fetishism reminds us, the commodity is a fetish because it appears to its actual producers as an independent entity that rules them "instead of being ruled by them" (323). Yet, while Marx acknowledges the seeming independence of the commodity, he nevertheless argues that the social relations of the commodity's production remain congealed within it. In other words, the commodity always remains an object produced through definite forms of labour; while this labour is obscured by the commodity's exchange-value – which is generally expressed in the form of a price that functions as a "social hieroglyphic" (Marx 1978a, 322) or what Baudrillard calls a "coded abstraction" in need of deciphering – it can never be completely eradicated by it. In a similar vein, it is important to note that the production of the "illiterate Third World woman" is far from arbitrary. While this figure circulates as a deracinated fetish within the neo-imperial imaginary – and thus is subject to what Baurdrillard calls a "labour of signification," emptied of substance and history – it is the outcome and manifestation of social relations of gendered, racialized, and imperial power that govern relations between the global north and global south in the present-day. Hence, while this figure should not be hypostatized, neither can it be simply wished out of existence as pure artifice. Put

differently, this figure exists only as an object of and for imperial ruling, even though its appearance as an objective representation of Afghan women's plight conceals the social antagonisms of which it is a product and, consequently, makes Afghan women's victimization appear natural and inevitable.

Indeed, empire necessitated this simultaneous invention of the figure of the Afghan woman as a helpless "illiterate Third World woman" and the disavowal of Afghan women's agency. As Jill Steans (2009) observes, if the Afghan war was to be presented as a mission to liberate Afghan women from the clutches of the "dangerous Muslim man," and the U.S.-I.S.A.F. as the sole champions of women's rights within the region, "innocent women—in essence passive and non-political victims—had to be written into the script" (Steans 2009, 164). It is primarily by defining all Afghan women as existing outside the domain of literacy that neo-imperial narratives have been able to construct them as "innocent women": tragic, disempowered victims devoid of the capacity for both epistemic and political self-representation and therefore incapable of acting on their own behalf because they cannot read and write. However, as we have seen, this definition could become definitional only by "*condensing* the subaltern into a certain feature" (illiteracy) and "*amplifying* that feature to fill the whole narrative space" (Ghosh 2001, 43). In other words, neo-imperial narratives could represent the Taliban's denial of literacy education to women as a "crisis" or humanitarian emergency worthy of foreign intervention into a sovereign country only to the extent that Afghan women were desubjectified and turned instead into objects of imperial knowledge production. And, this process required that the history of Afghan feminism be transformed into a "non-

event" and the heterogeneity of Afghan women's lives reduced to and displaced by hyperbolic figure of the "illiterate Third World woman."

III. Civilizational Thinking and Western Gender Exceptionalism[40]

The productive power of the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" therefore lies in its capacity to cast all Afghan women as exemplary victims of "Third World difference" in need of Western assistance. However, this is not the only political work this figure accomplishes for empire. Emptied of historicity and agency, this figure also serves as a foil to demarcate an absolute division between the West and its others and to thereby construct the West as a beacon of the civility, modernity, and gender freedoms apparently absent in the non-West. Indeed, while narratives of the "illiterate Third World woman" are ostensibly about the plight of Afghan women, they reveal much more about the West's own self-definition and self-imagining as a site of gender and sexual exceptionalism than they do about Afghan women's lives and histories. These narratives therefore must be examined not solely for how they legitimate the G.W.O.T. and Afghan war, but also for the story they tell about the superiority of the Western sex/gender order.

This story about the West as a site of sexual and gender freedoms absent in the non-West is especially evident in the rhetoric of Western civilization and Eastern barbarism that informed the Bush administration's foreign policy discourse during the early years of the war. In the months after 9/11, the Bush administration explicitly appealed to the Taliban's denial of literacy and education to women in order to portray Al Qaeda, in general, and Afghanistan, in particular, as the negative or reverse image of the

[40] I borrow the term "civilizational thinking" from Moallem (2005, 12).

West and as a major threat to Western civilization and its "values" (defined as exclusively European in origin) (Arat-Koc 2005).[41] For instance, in November 2001, after the invasion of Afghanistan, Bush proclaimed: "This new enemy seeks to destroy our freedom and impose its views. We value life; the terrorists ruthlessly destroy it. We value education; the terrorists do not believe women should be educated or should have health care, or should leave their homes." At the same time, First Lady Laura Bush (2001) used the literacy crisis of Afghan women as a grid according to which the U.S. could differentiate its supposed regime of gender equality from the world of "brutality against women and children" that "the terrorists would like to impose on the rest of us," the "civilized people throughout the world."

Representing 9/11 as an attack on Western civilization and its values of gender equality and education, such neo-imperial narratives depend for their intelligibility on what Derek Gregory (2004), borrowing from Michael Shapiro, calls an "architecture of enmity" (16). This architecture erects a Manichean partition between the physical and imaginative geographies occupied by "us" and "them": between a sex/gender order that is liberal, modern, and Western – in which gender equality and women's rights are respected and "First Ladies give speeches" – and another that is anti-feminist, illiberal, traditional, and non-Western – which denies women even the basic right of education and threatens to destroy the West (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784).

[41] Erased from this decontextualized and dehistoricized notion of "culture" and civilization are therefore the internal complexity and moments of self-critique within both non-Western and Western cultures. Such culturalist thinking instead offers only a reductive concept of culture as a set of stable and knowable group traits and attributes that are eternal and monolithic, and that "disagree only with 'Other cultures'" (Narayan 2000, 96).

This deployment of gender to erect a civilizational divide between what Stuart Hall (1992) calls "the West and the Rest" is characteristic not only of the Bush administration's discourse. Since 9/11, it has also become a key area of research within the discipline of American political science (see also Razack 2008). For instance, in their widely-cited *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change Around the World*, Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris (2003b) expand upon Samuel P. Huntington's thesis that the primary "fault line" in contemporary global politics is rooted in a fourteen-hundred year old "clash of civilizations."[42] Huntington (1997) holds that this clash is between the principles of Western Christianity – and its commitment to values of universalism, human rights, and democracy – and traditional Islamic culture – which he argues lacks these values. However, while Huntington proposes that the cause of global conflict in the post-Cold War era is Islam's negation of Western values, Inglehart and Norris (2003a) instead argue that the "*true* clash of civilizations" in the early-twenty-first century is primarily over gender equality and women's participation in the public sphere. Echoing and openly celebrating the Bush administration's foreign policy discourse on Afghan women, Inglehart and Norris (2003a) place female freedom, autonomy, literacy, and education exclusively on the side of Western capitalist modernity. "Muslim societies" not only lack these qualities, they argue, but an "Islamic religious heritage is the most powerful barrier to the rising tide of gender equality" around the world (49).[43] Just like the civilizational thinking that informs the Bush administration's discourse, their work appeals primarily to cultural differences to produce what Gail Lewis (2006) calls, in

[42] See also Razack (2008) for a critique of Inglehart and Norris's civilizational logic.
[43] See also Adams and Orloff (2005).

another context, an "ethno-spatialization of emancipatory possibilities" in which feminism and literacy are portrayed as belonging to "us" alone, while "Muslim societies" are cast exclusively as a site of danger for women (92). However, underlying this civilizational/culturalist logic is a disavowed racial thinking (in particular an anti-Muslim racism) that constitutes groups of people as marked by different kinds of characters and values, and thus as different types of human beings (Thobani 2007; Razack 2008). While this form of anti-Muslim racism does not rely on explicit notions of biological inferiority, it nevertheless endows the population identified as Muslim "with fixed, unchanging and negative characteristics" and subjects it to "relations of inferiorisation and exclusion" (Anthias 1995, 294).

This is not the first time that "the woman question" has been used to demarcate an insurmountable difference between "the West and the Rest" and to thereby construct "Western women" as free in contradistinction to "Muslim women" who are portrayed as victims of Islamic patriarchy. Feminist historians and postcolonial scholars have shown that British and French colonial administrators in Algeria, Egypt, and Persia often used the body of the Muslim woman as the symbol of the boundary between empire and colony, Occident and Orient: the veil and the seraglio, in particular, were taken as evidence of a subservient and sequestered Muslim womanhood, the backwardness of Islamic societies, the barbaric nature of Muslim men, and the superiority of the West's gender relations.[44] Yet, as Mohja Kahf (1999) reminds us, this Orientalist image of the oppressed Muslim woman served not solely as a justification for European colonial

[44] See Fanon (1965); Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989); Enloe (1990); Lazreg (1994); and Yeğenoğlu (1998).

relations with Islam. It was also formed in response to, and offered legitimation for, shifts in Western norms of respectable feminine subjectivity and desire that accompanied the rise of the capitalist market economy in European societies. Indeed, European representations of Muslim women as odalisque or concubine became dominant at the same time as the Western model of aristocratic femininity – and its emphasis on "cosmetic self-display" and "frivolous amusements" – was being replaced by a new bourgeois model that idealized a rigid and narrow role for the emerging middle class woman as sexually pure and passive "housewife" (116).[45] Within Enlightenment thought, the Muslim woman of the seraglio – without choice of marriage partner and subservient to her polygamous patriarchal husband – functioned simultaneously as a symbol of the tyranny of monarchical despotism in Europe and a "negative counter-image" that justified the new feminine model of domesticity that accompanied the emergence of the liberal doctrine of the public and private as separate but equal spheres (Kahf 1999, 117).

This liberal doctrine naturalized the new European middle class woman's exclusion from the public sphere and wage labour and her subordinate position within the private, domestic sphere of the emerging nuclear family. However, according to liberal philosophers, her role differed from the Muslim woman of the seraglio because her duties were not believed to constitute sexual slavery. Instead, modern ideologies of companionate marriage and love between equals – in contrast to the aristocratic model of marriage as an institution for securing dynastic lines and inheritance – advanced an image of the "competent housewife" as freely entering into the marriage contract and thus as

[45] See also Kabbani (1986) and Federici (2004).

voluntarily submitting to patriarchal rule without coercion (Kahf 1999, 115). This new model of marriage, while promising women freedom and equality, instead functioned as what Carole Pateman (1988) famously calls a "sexual contract" that established men's civil freedom in the public sphere and political right over and sexual access to women's bodies in the private sphere. Yet, as Kahf's work suggests, by contrasting the new position of the European women in the private sphere to the more overtly repressive and authoritarian patriarchal system of the seraglio, early modern thinkers could rationalize this new form of Western patriarchalism as a benevolent and egalitarian gender order within which women consented to their place in the private sphere.

At the same time, Western imperial powers could point to this supposedly egalitarian gender order in order to justify the West's right to rule over the authoritarian patriarchal regime of Islam. In other words, the "sexual contract" was central to what Charles W. Mills (1997) calls the "racial contract." Just as the sexual contract of liberal-patriarchalism involved a pact between men to control and dominate women, Mills suggests that the political-economic system of white supremacy and imperialism was similarly based on a "contract" between "those categorized as white *over* the nonwhites, who are thus the objects rather than the subjects of the agreement" (12, *emphasis in original*).[46]

Following Kahf's insights into how the differential production of "free" and "unfree" femininities in the early modern/colonial era operated within Western thought to

[46] While Pateman and Mills originally conceived of the "sexual" and "racial" contracts as distinct, in *Contract and Domination* (2007) they suggest that these contracts actually have an intertwined history.

justify both a new patriarchalism at home and imperialism abroad, I suggest that the neo-imperial image of the Afghan woman as the "illiterate Third World woman" must also be approached as part-and-parcel of a regime of governing or ruling both non-Western and Western female subjects that operates by producing what Foucault (2003) calls a "biopolitical" distinction between different populations and subjectivities based on geographic location and "culture." Foucault (2003) defines biopolitics as a mode of political power that aims to foster and secure the health, welfare, and life of the population. It operates primarily through the art of "governmentatity": those tactics and techniques that aim to shape, guide, and direct the conduct of others and to thereby compel subjects to govern themselves according to particular norms (Foucault 2000). Foucault's studies of biopolitics and governmentality focused on the history of Western Europe; yet, as Inderpal Grewal (2005) suggests, the history of colonial discourse on Muslim women demonstrates that the biopolitical governing of Western space is intimately connected to geopolitics. Indeed, this history reveals that Foucault's notions of biopolitics and governmentality must be extended to examine "how populations are judged in relation to each other – differences are produced between populations on the basis of territory, culture, gender, race, nation – and technologies of governance are devised, applied, and adjudicated in relation to these differences" (Grewal 2005, 18). Such an approach would therefore allow for an analysis of how neo-imperialism, while positing Western and Afghan women as mutually exclusive populations, nevertheless governs and regulates these populations in relation to each other.

If the odalisque functioned within the Western colonial imagination to shore up the new image of the middle class housewife as freely choosing her subservient role, how does the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" (as the quintessential victim of Islamic patriarchy) produce particular idealized images of Western female freedom and liberation in the present-day? And, how do these images operate as forms of governmental power that seek to remake Western female subjectivity in particular ways? Given that the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" functions in the neo-imperial imaginary not only to divide the West from the Rest but also to construct the West as a site of gender and sexual exceptionalism where gender equality and sexual freedoms have been secured, this figure must be approached not only as a rationale for the war abroad. It must also be situated in the context of the changing definitions of Western femininity and the reconfiguration of the terrain of feminist politics (and other equality-seeking movements) that has accompanied the rise of neo-liberal post-feminist discourse within contemporary Western societies.

Indeed, as I suggested in the introduction to this dissertation, the claims that the West is best for women and that Western women represent the "teleological endpoint of emancipation" (Wekker 2004, 490), while part of the official "War story" of the G.W.O.T., have also been constitutive features of post-feminist discourse over the last decade. Angela McRobbie (2009) describes the "cultural space of post-feminism" as operating through a "double entanglement" with feminism (6): it "actively draw[s] on and invoke[s] feminism as that which can be taken into account in order to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of meanings which emphasize

that it is no longer needed, a spent force" (4-5). Unlike the backlash politics of the 1980s and its explicit assault on feminist gains, McRobbie (2009) argues that post-feminism is instead a new regime of power in which many of the tenets of liberal feminism (especially its demand for women's equal participation in the paid labour market and the public sphere) are "engaged with," "instrumentalized," and "incorporated" within Western political and popular discourses on gender such that they have become "common sense" (even though these demands remain unfulfilled) (5-6).[47]

This incorporation of liberal feminism into mainstream political and popular discourses has occurred alongside two other trends in U.S. politics: first, the legitimation and normalization of queer culture and politics, and the assimilation of (some) gay, lesbian, and queer subjects into the fold of commodity culture and heterosexual citizenship (through changes in marriage laws and family recognition) – a phenomenon Lisa Duggan (2002) calls "homonormativity"[48]; and, second, the emergence of post-racial or colour-blind discourse that celebrates the U.S. as a nation of multicultural inclusion where "race" no longer matters.[49] Drawing upon and combining some aspects of homonormative and post-racial discourse, post-feminism celebrates the entry and participation of Western women – of various sexualities and "races" – in education and employment, and their increased sexual freedoms, as evidence that the (liberal) feminist demand for equality has been reached, that the old sexual contract that Pateman argued

[47] Hester Eisenstein (2009) and Nancy Fraser (2009) offer similar interpretations of how liberal feminist ideals have been incorporated into mainstream politics and thereby depoliticized.
[48] For critiques of queer normalization, see Wilchins (1997); Hennessy (2000); Puar (2007); and Stryker (2008).
[49] For discussions of the new post-racial discourse in the U.S., see Wise (2010); Kaplan (2011); Parks and Hughey (2011); Andrews and Tuitt (2013); and Squire (2014).

excluded women from full citizenship and the old racial contract that Mills argued excluded non-whites from participation in the liberal polity have been broken, and that all female subjects can now "take their place" in the public sphere (McRobbie 2007, 725). At the same time, post-feminism points to this supposed success as a sign that feminist activism – not only in its liberal feminist manifestations, but in its anti-racist and queer feminist varieties as well – is now passé.

This celebratory discourse of female success and capacity appears positive in contrast to the neo-imperial construction of "the illiterate Third World woman" as victim. However, such post-feminist discourse of Western gender and sexual exceptionalism is productive of new regulatory norms of subjectivity and citizenship that are consonant with the key principles of neo-liberalism: its curtailment of the public sphere; its dismantling of the welfare state and realignment of the boundary between the public and private through the privatization of what were once considered public services and their transfer to the realms of the market and the family (and thus to the unpaid reproductive labour of women) (Bakker 2003); its replacement of the male breadwinner model of social citizenship that characterized the post-War welfare state with a new gender order that requires women to take their place alongside men as citizen-workers and conform to the "Universal Breadwinner" (Fraser 1994, 601) or "adult worker" (Lewis 2001) model of citizenship (Young 2005); its requirement for a feminized, flexible, and part-time labour force in which women and racialized peoples predominate; and its emphasis on self-reliance, individualism, entrepreneurship, and consumption in the capitalist marketplace as strategies of liberation.

According to McRobbie (2009), post-feminism constitutes a "new sexual contract," and I would suggest a new "racial contract," for Western women (2). Women are presented with a "notional form of equality," which requires that they remake themselves according to the neo-liberal model of the autonomous market-based citizen, eschew state assistance and group-based identities, and assume individual responsibility for their own success or failure in the global economy (McRobbie 2009, 2).[50] This new sexual-racial contract hails young women, in particular, as what McRobbie (2009) (following the playwright Caryl Churchill [1982]) calls "top girls": individualized subjects of education and employment success who are no longer constrained by traditional modes of patriarchal authority, racial injustice, or hetero-sexist discrimination (McRobbie 2009, 54).

The new sexual-racial contract is most apparent in the realm of education. Jessica Ringrose (2007, 2013) notes that, in the aftermath of liberal feminist struggles in the 1970s and 1980s to promote girls' educational attainment, the 1990s witnessed a neo-liberalization of feminist educational policy agendas in the U.K., Australia, Canada, and the U.S. During this period, discourses around "successful girls" and "failing boys" proliferated (Arnot and Mac an Ghaill 2006). Pointing to girls' newfound success in education and their outpacing of boys on literacy tests, these discourses celebrate girls (who are posited as a homogeneous group) as emblems of female progress, social

[50] While Nancy Fraser (2009) does not discuss post-feminism, she nevertheless notes how the rhetoric of feminism and of the "family wage now supplies a good part of the romance that invests flexible capitalism with a higher meaning and moral end point," which is "needed to motivate new generations to shoulder the inherently meaningless work of endless accumulation" (110, 109). See also Brodie (1995); Berlant (1997); and Brodie (2008).

mobility, and social change in the present day (Harris 2004; Ringrose 2007; Baker 2010). Girls and young women are now associated with educational achievement, and with the skills and aptitude necessary to be successful in neo-liberal times (Walkerdine and Ringrose 2007; McRobbie 2007). Yet, underpinning this neo-liberal decree that young women can be anything they want is the requirement that they "do careful and painstaking work on themselves" (Gonick 2007, 439), understand their lives as unencumbered by the old structural inequalities that concerned feminist and critical pedagogy, and learn how to continually reinvent themselves according to the demands of the market (Baker 2010; McRobbie 2009). Taught in ways that support neo-liberalism, "pushed firmly in the direction of independence and self-reliance," young women have thus become what McRobbie (2009) calls the "intensively managed subjects of post-feminist, gender-aware biopolitical practices of new governmentality" (59).

It is important to note, however, that post-feminism can posit this particular neo-liberal configuration of Western femininity as epitomical of gender and sexual freedom only by displacing or projecting gender oppression and illiteracy onto the non-West (Al-Saji 2009; Oliver 2010). This displacement operates by situating Western hetero-patriarchal relations as things of the past, disavowing continuing forms of gender, sexual, racial, colonial, ageist, and class injustice at home, and thereby concealing the "common differences" between and among the lives of subordinate subjects in both the "West" and the "non-West" (Mohanty 2003, 203). For instance, post-feminism's celebration of girls' educational success obscures continuing heterosexist, racial, and class relations that structure children's and young adults' experiences of success and failure in literacy and

schooling; it thereby shores up the figure of the "top girl" as ostensibly heterosexual, upper or middle class, and white despite post-feminist, homonormative, and post-racial claims that all girls can equally become subjects of capacity (Ringrose 2007, 2013; Baker 2010).

Post-feminist discourses of female success exist alongside a new politics of sexualization in schools, which targets young women's bodies and desires for regulation according to heteronormative sexual scripts (Ringrose 2013). Hence, at the same time as post-feminism celebrates girls' success in entering traditionally male domains and crossing the gender binary, girls' bodies and sexualities have been subject to renewed form of hetero-sexist policing. Sex education within and outside the classroom places the burden on young women to regulate their sexuality and desires according to contradictory heteronormative fantasies that require girls to be both desirable to the male gaze and chaste and innocent (Duschinsky 2013; Renold and Ringrose 2013; Ringrose 2013).

Post-feminist discourse is also largely silent on how neo-liberal reforms in education that emphasize standardized testing – such as the Bush administrations' "No Child Left Behind Act" and Obama's "Race to the Top" program – disproportionally penalize poor and racialized children and youth (Giroux 2010). These students score below white middle class students on these tests and their schools – "equipped with security guards, drug-sniffing dogs, see-through knapsacks, metal detectors, and zero tolerance policies" – are akin to prisons (Giroux 2010, 219; Brown and Donner 2012). It also ignores both the renewed anti-Muslim racism in the U.S. post-9/11 that has led to heightened policing of, and violence against, Muslim youth (Shirazi 2010), and the

ongoing colonial relations in white settler states of the Americas, which have dispossessed indigenous communities of their languages and literacies while also denying them the educational opportunities offered other communities (Klug 2012). Moreover, post-feminist discourses of female success elide generational divides between girls and women, rendering invisible the large numbers of adult women with limited basic literacy proficiency or schooled education living in the U.S.[51] These working class women (who are often women of colour and migrant women) are absorbed into the primarily part-time, low-paid service-sector industries that serve the new "top girls" (Sassen 1998, 2000, 2004). Moreover, the participation of these "top girls" in the paid labour market is largely facilitated by hiring domestic workers – most notably migrant women of colour without citizenship status – to fulfill the tasks of social reproduction in the family (Parrenas 2001, 2008; Ehrenreich and Hoschchild 2004; Arat Koc 2006). The "freedom" and "liberation" of mostly upper- and middle-class women from the traditional gender roles of wife and mother (and from the invisible, devalued, and unpaid tasks of housework and child care) are therefore purchased on the backs of these working class and racialized women (Arat-Koc 2006). Yet, despite this unequal distribution of technical literacy skills and educational opportunities along class, race, and generational lines, the high educational achievements of a small group of affluent young women are taken as proof that neo-

[51] As Mev Miller (2005) notes, the reported numbers of women with limited literacy skills in advanced capitalist countries vary according to which survey is used and how "functional" literacy is defined. As she notes, some studies show that more than 50% of women in the U.S. have lower technical literacy skills than high school graduates, while 23% of adult women are deemed to have "severely limited" technical literacy skills in comparison to 17% of men.

liberal educational policies work and that all girls and women can "just do it" (Ringrose 2007, 484).

By abjecting both gender injustice and illiteracy onto non-Western societies, post-feminism not only constructs the West as the guarantor and origin of gender equality (Mohanty 2003, 184); it also serves an equally important role of reassuring Western women of their success and thereby of legitimating the closure of spaces for feminist politics in the West (Oliver 2010). As McRobbie (2004) puts it, post-feminist discourse presents feminism as having "served its purpose" in the West by making educational and economic opportunities available to (some) women; and "this is used as a means of suggesting, in no uncertain terms, that there is no longer any need for further radicalization (a depoliticizing gesture), while at the same time the very terrain – the hard won territory of these radicalisms – is, in effect, dismantled, undone" (508). In the name of "equality achieved," neo-liberal states in the West have increasingly cut programs aimed at remedying racial and class disparities and dismantled their gender-based policy machineries or programs, thereby limiting political space for feminists and other equality-seeking groups within the state.[52] Indeed, at the same time as the U.S. portrayed the Afghan war as a means to free victimized illiterate Afghan women from their barbarous men and cultures, it cut literacy programs and projects aimed at promoting gender equality at home.[53] As I outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, during the period of the G.W.O.T., the U.S. cut funding to adult literacy programs and advocated workfare

[52] See Duggan (2003); McRobbie (2004); Bakker and Brodie (2008); Brodie (2008); and Eisenstein (2009).
[53] See Flanders (2004); Finlay (2006); Brodie (2008); and Eisenstein (2009).

over retraining and literacy education for welfare. Such cuts to adult education have effectively dispossessed working people and communities of the minimal right to education that had been won through the social wage garnered under the welfare state regimes that dominated the political landscape in the post-WWII period in the West until the mid-1970s. At the same time, the U.S. government attacked affirmative action programs, shut down women's bureaus and ministries, and de-funded programs to assist women in the U.S.[54]

Many feminists view this paradoxical celebration of feminism abroad and disavowal of feminism at home as "anti-feminist" backlash (Eisenstein 2007; Oliver 2007; Hunt and Rygeil 2008). I would like to propose, however, that it can be more accurately interpreted as "post-feminist." Neo-imperial narratives of the "illiterate Third World woman" in need of Western-style freedoms are part and parcel of the same post-feminist logic that excludes Western feminists from the neo-liberal state in the name of equality achieved. This is because the civilizational discourse of a Western "us" against a "traditional other" upon which the new imperialism relies requires that the West be viewed as a post-feminist bastion of gender equality and the non-West as pre-feminist in order for the West to claim the ability to assist Afghan women into modernity through military and development interventions. In other words, within the neo-imperial imaginary, the claim to Western superiority and omnipotence rests upon a particular image of the West's sex/gender order, which presents formal gender equality as already

[54] For a discussion of cuts to and the restructuring of adult literacy programs in the U.S., see Rivera (2008). For a discussion of cuts to women's programs that occurred under Bush's reign, see Flanders (2004); Finlay (2006); and Eisenstein (2009).

achieved and feminism as needed here only insofar as it can be exported to the injured and "illiterate Third World woman" mired by her traditional anti-feminist culture. Michelle Ferguson (2007) summarizes the post-feminist discourse that has informed U.S. foreign policy since 9/11 as follows:

> Women's rights were achieved for Americans long ago, so there is no need for feminists to agitate for them at home. The work to be done is to be done abroad. Even if there are problems that American women face...these are nothing compared with the atrocities that women suffered under the Taliban and in the rape camps of Saddam Hussein. So our attention is best directed toward liberating women in other countries (211).

Within this civilizational framework, then, only "women in other countries" (particularly Muslim women in Afghanistan and Iraq) are the proper objects of feminist activism; it is they who must be brought the same kind of neo-liberal freedoms now on offer to their Western counterparts. Hence, at the same time as neo-imperial narratives of the "illiterate Third World woman" normalize post-feminist politics at home, post-feminist discourses of Western gender exceptionalism legitimate military action and post-war reconstruction policies and programs in Afghanistan.

IV. Post-War Reconstruction and the Remaking of Gendered Subjects

Indeed, the counteractive construction of the "Western woman" as free and the "illiterate third world woman" as victim is central not only to the neo-liberal regulation of Western women's lives. The post-feminist discourse of Western female freedom, and its equation of gender liberation with individual women's success in the public sphere and market,

also provides the framework according to which the lives of Afghan women have been governed by Western military forces, international financial institutions, and donor agencies since the onset of the Afghan war. In this section, I turn to the Western-driven, top-down post-conflict peace-building, state reconstruction, and development agenda in Afghanistan. As I show, this agenda aims not solely to annihilate the enemy – to "drive out the Taliban and the terrorists" (Bush 2002b) – and thus to rescue Afghan women *from* local Afghan patriarchy and misogyny. It is also equally concerned with rescuing Afghan women *to* "liberal peace" – defined as democratic "good" governance, Western models of civil society, and neo-liberal market economies (Duffield 2001, 34) – and thus with remaking both Afghanistan and Afghan women (Siefert 2009).

This post-conflict reconstruction project of institutional reform and political and economic liberalization was a key element of the Bush administration's counter-terrorism strategy (Chishti 2010). It informed both the Bonn Agreement of December 2001 – a power-sharing agreement between the Northern Alliance and the international community that outlined the priorities for government restructuring – and the January 2006 Afghan Compact – which focused primarily on the development of Afghanistan into a liberal democratic state and a market economy (Kandiyoti 2007b). With the inability of I.S.A.F. to defeat the Taliban, the growth of insurgent attacks after 2005, and the shift in the foreign policy objectives of some Coalition members from a combat to a non-combat role in Afghanistan, this strategy of political and economic reform became even more pronounced (Bell and Evans 2010; Chishti 2010). The Obama administration's counter-insurgency doctrine, in particular, elevated "the role of diplomacy and

development alongside defence" in its war strategy (Clinton 2010; see also Obama 2009; U.S. State Department 2010). Merging development aid and securitization, this doctrine has prioritized reconstruction interventions as central to the goals of winning the "hearts and minds" of Afghan citizens and to galvanizing popular support against and local capacity to resist the insurgency (Bell and Evans 2010; Chishti 2010).

This merger of development and security is a hallmark of post-Cold War conflict more generally, and reflects the new orthodoxy among Western states, multilateral organizations, and military experts that poverty and bad governance or "failed" states in the "third world" are the causes of global conflict.[55] As Mark Duffield (2007) notes, underdevelopment is no longer viewed solely as evidence of the "backwardness" of the "third world"; it is instead posited as a cause of civil war, terrorism, and insurgency. While security is now viewed as a precondition for development, aid and development have become key components of security policies (C. Bell 2011). One consequence of this militarization of development is therefore that "liberal practices of development traditionally associated with N.G.O.s have been rediscovered as essentially civilian forms of counterinsurgency" (Duffield 2007, 157). For instance, while at one time the U.N. and humanitarian organizations focused primarily on providing relief to victims of war, today these institutions focus on exporting to so-called "ungoverned spaces" and "unruly populations" Western neo-liberal models of political, economic, and social development (Kienscherf 2013, 135). At the same time, the strategy of war advanced by the U.S. administration and its allies has also changed (Bell and Evans 2010). No longer is war

[55] See Bello (2006); Duffield (2001, 2007); and Ismael et al. (2011).

concerned solely with the "material destruction of human bodies and populations" (Mbembe 2003, 3). The scope of war is increasingly biopolitical. Its aim is to redefine the very terrain of *how* life is to be lived, and thus to restructure and govern the civilian population itself in order to secure the Western "homeland" from the threats originating in the underdeveloped "global borderland" (such as the terrorist attacks of 9/11) (Duffield 2005, 147). Reconstruction efforts are therefore not separate from war – notwithstanding the misnomer "post-war." As Kirsch and Flint (2011) suggest, they are instead part of a "complex and contested phase within a long-term or permanent war" (12); reconstruction is "war by other means" (197).

As a strategy of war, reconstruction involves more than the transformation of economic and political structures (Seifert 2009). It simultaneously targets existing gendered subjectivities and relations for reform and education (Dyvik 2014). As Ruth Seifert (2009) notes, in the post-Cold War era, reconstruction efforts typically take aim at traditional gender roles and encourage women to "individualize themselves, claim their human rights, [and] become competent actors in the economy and competitive players in the liberal market" (35). In other words, these efforts seek to remake women according the image of the autonomous, rights-bearing, and self-reliant subject celebrated in neo-liberal post-feminism.

Throughout the Afghan war, literacy has been a central element of international reconstruction efforts to reform Afghanistan and transform the immature and infantile "illiterate Third World woman," unready for self-government, into "top girls." Both Bush's and Obama's counter-insurgency doctrines have tied basic literacy programming

to women's political empowerment, state restructuring, and the peace-building process. While the U.N. has advocated for the inclusion of women in political institutions through the use of electoral gender quotas and gender mainstreaming,[56] the U.S.'s counter-insurgency and reconstruction efforts instead have primarily supported projects aimed at removing traditional barriers to women's opportunities and promoting their entry into civic life (Kandioyti 2007a, 2007b; see Krook et al. 2010). U.S.-funded literacy initiatives for Afghan women, in particular, have been promoted not only as programs to increase women's formal reading and writing skills, but also as necessary to build "democratically-elected institutions of civil society that give a greater voice to women and young adults, and that deepen grassroots participatory governance" (USAIDa).

In addition to advancing women's political empowerment and participation, literacy has also been posited by the U.S. as a panacea for terrorism and thus as key to its counter-insurgency strategy. For instance, as I mentioned above, Bush (2006) identified male illiteracy as the cause of the "hopelessness" that enables "the spread of radicalism" and terrorism. He urged the international community to fund literacy programs in Afghanistan since these programs have the power to "help spread prosperity and peace" and "to help those who feel hopeless…[by] giving people the fantastic hope that comes from being able to read and realize dreams." Situating the lack of investment in Afghan women's literacy as central to state failure, Obama's 2010 Regional Stabilization Plan in Afghanistan and Pakistan similarly positioned literacy programs as key components of "civilian stabilization" and as necessary to "strengthen Afghan communities' capacity to

[56] For a discussion of the gender quota system in Afghanistan, see Krook, O'Brien and Swip (2010).

withstand the threat posed by extremism" (Department of State 2010, 22; see also Fakir and Malik 2007).[57] And, both the Bush and Obama administrations have pointed the presence of such literacy initiatives after 9/11 as evidence of "the young democracy and the power of freedom on display across Afghanistan" (L. Bush 2005), and of the new era of democratization, modernization, and peace produced by the Afghan war that has returned women "to their rightful place in society" (U.S. State Department 2001). Both the Bush and Obama adminstrations' policy positions on literacy in Afghanistan thus echo the autonomous model of literacy outlined in the introduction to this study: a model based on the assumption that literacy (as a set of technical reading and writing skills) has the power to transform (on its own) unequal social and political relations and, in the case of Afghanistan, to secure both Afghan communities and Western societies from the threat of terrorism.

The claim that Western reconstruction projects have created a new phase of peace, security, freedom, and political agency for Afghan women requires closer investigation. Although the U.S.'s strategy of political reform celebrates literacy as the

[57] While literacy has been key to the rhetoric of the G.W.O.T., little attention has been paid to the content of literacy education. For instance, while one of stated goals of literacy programs for Afghan boys is to neutralize the potential security threat posed by illiterate young men, and thus to contribute to the country's Demobilization, Demilitarization, and Reintergartion (DDR) campaign, the textbooks commissioned by UNICEF and USAID in 2002 for these programs were reprints of student books created by the University of Nebraska Omahar (UNO) in the 1980s as part of the CIA's attempt to support the resistance against the Soviets. These UNO books were originally produced with the assistance of six of the seven *Mujahedin* groups in Afghanistan and promote ethnic division and violence against non-Sunni Muslims, infidels, and communists (Spink 2005; Paulson and Rappleye 2007). While overt incitements to violence were removed from the 2002 reprints, references to mistrust of non-Sunni and non-Pushtun groups were not. To the extent that the security and development policies of both the Bush and Obama administrations focus on the mere presence of literacy initiatives rather than their curriculum or the context in which learning occurs as key to the peace process, these policies may actuallywork against peace and reproduce what Nef (2003) calls a "pedagogy of violence" (58).

technology through which women can reenter Afghanistan's governance structures and be transformed from helpless victims to civic actors, Afghan women have been largely excluded from peace and reconstruction efforts. Despite the unanimously-adopted U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security – which calls for the full participation of women in conflict prevention and resolution, and for the protection of women in war zones – reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan fall primarily under the control of the international donor community and global institutions (Moghadam 2005; Bello 2006; Kandiyoti 2007a, 2007b). Moreover, they have failed to provide security to women, who continue to be subjected to myriad forms of gendered violence despite the presence of U.S. and N.A.T.O. troops and legal reforms under the Karzai government that criminalized violence against women, such as the 2010 Elimination of Violence Against Women Act (UNAMA 2011; Khan 2014; Oxfam 2014). For instance, while the Bonn Process included representatives of the different ethnic and tribal groups in Afghanistan, only 3 of the 33 delegates were women and Afghan women's groups were not invited to participate (Whitworth 2004). This exclusion has continued since the Bonn Agreement: Afghan women were included in only two of the twenty-three peace talks held between the Taliban, the Afghan government, and the international community, and were excluded from international conferences on Afghanistan's post-war reconstruction and development, including the December 2014 London Conference (Khan 2014; Human Rights Watch 2014; Oxfam 2014). Indeed, rather than engage in dialogue with the very women the U.S.-I.S.A.F. forces promised the rescue, the U.S. and international community have instead "'feminized' them...subjecting them to a form of paternalist

intervention premised on the assumption that the coalition of Western forces knew what was good for Afghani women better than they knew themselves" (Hawkesworth 2005, 132).

This exclusion and paternalism also underwrites top-down gender mainstreaming and reconstruction policies, including literacy policies. While these policies and programs promise to increase women's rights and political participation in Afghanistan, they are made by external powers and international organizations (Seifert 2009). Moreover, these policies and programs have faced backlash not only from conservative political leaders and warlords in rural areas, but also from within the Afghan government (for instance President Hamid Karzai's support for the 2012 Code of Conduct edit declaring that women are worth less than men) (Oxfam 2014; Khan 2014). The presence of these gender polices therefore speaks more to the international community's control over Afghanistan and to "the stunted and restricted nature of politics under international governance than the empowerment of…women" (Pupovic 2005, 394).

For example, gender quotas were not a key priority of Afghan women's groups (which viewed security and freedom from violence as their principal concerns), but were advocated primarily by the U.N., which has long prioritized female political representation as a key to post-war reconstruction (see Krook et al. 2010). While this imposed policy agenda has provided opportunities for some women to hold political office (particularly women with connections to warlords or politically-powerful families), many female politicians have been the target of hostility and death threats within the national assembly; moreover, their role often has been solely to "rubber-stamp"

legislation drafted by the international community (Schmeidl 2009; Chistie 2010). Indeed, as Maliha Chistie (2010) notes, the merging of aid into the U.S. military apparatus and its counter-insurgency doctrine has made female politicians and other women who are seen as benefiting from the Afghan war the targets of the insurgency. Moreover, despite the claims of the Bush and Obama administrations to be bringing literacy to Afghan women, adult literacy programs for women have received only minimal attention within post-conflict reconstruction educational policies. Donor agencies have focused primarily on implementing UNICEF's 2002 'Back to School' campaign for younger children in the accordance with its Education for All targets (Spink 2007). As a consequence, in 2007 the functional literacy rate for Afghan women was only 12.6% (Centre for Policy and Human Development 2007). In addition, the literacy programs offered for women are most often organized by non-elected and often-times elite N.G.O.S that primarily rely on external funders for their survival, and thus tend to echo the priorities of their international sponsors rather than the local population (Moghadam 2005; Bello 2006; Kandiyoti 2007a).

Hence, while the U.S. has pointed to the participation of women in elections and the presence of women's literacy programs as benchmarks of Afghanistan's success in transitioning to democracy, such top-down international policies are ultimately predicated on undemocratic relations that place the West in a position of gendered and racialized trusteeship over Afghanistan, exclude Afghan women from the political, and thus limit the capacity of these women to determine their own political and educational visions and agendas. Such relations of trusteeship are not unique to G.W.O.T. Feminist and

postcolonial theorists have long noted that the rescue fantasies through which empire produces itself as "the establisher of the good society" and the saviour of "brown women from brown men" (Spivak 1988, 299) are predicated on what Iris Marion Young (2003) calls a "logic of masculinist protection" that places women in a "subordinate position of dependence and obedience" in relation to their "protectors" (Young 2003, 2; Razack 2004).[58] As Young (2003) observes, while feminist theories of patriarchal politics overwhelmingly focus on masculinity as self-conscious domination of women, the "logic of masculinist protection" that undergirds rescue relations appears more benign than militarized masculinity and has more in common, she suggests, with ideas of chivalry. In this model of masculinity, Young (2003) explains, men do not overpower women and children for "the sake of their own gratification or to have the pleasure of domination"; the "gallantly masculine man is instead a loving and self-sacrificing protector, especially in relation to women" (4). Central to this logic of masculinist protection, however, is the subordination of those in the protected position. As Young (2003) notes, while chivalrous forms of masculinism appear to protect women from harm, the women themselves must pay a high price for this protection: they must obey and support their male protectors with gratitude and without question.

According to Young (2003), when this form of masculinist protection is extrapolated from the patriarchal household and becomes the basis for national and

[58] As Wendy Brown (1995) points out, masculinism refers not to a property contained within individual men, but rather to conventions of power and privilege that reproduce a heteronormative structure of gender hierarchy organized around male dominance and female subordination and obedience. While this politics of masculinism is not biologically given, it has been institutionalized and naturalized such that it has become normative.

international politics – as it has in the "security regime" that accompanies the G.W.O.T. – democratic relations are replaced with a bargain in which the protected must relinquish their autonomy in exchange for protection (8). As a consequence, the protected come to occupy a status in relation to their protectors that is akin to "the subordinate status of women in the patriarchal household" (2). In addition to this gendered logic, the politics of protection is also racialized. As Makua Matua (2001) notes in his analysis of the savior-victim-savage model that undergirds human rights discourse, protection discourses are marked by "racial connotations in which the international hierarchy of race and colour" that was the product of European colonial projects is reinscribed such that saviours are portrayed as exclusively white and Western and victims and savages as non-white and non-Western others who require tutelage in Western norms of civility (207; see also Razack 2004).

The subordinate status granted to the protected within this logic of protection therefore means that while post-war reconstruction projects in Afghanistan are premised on "the will to improve" Afghan women and transform them into liberal right's bearing subjects, they also position these women as "deficient subjects" in permanent need of external guidance (Li 2007, 1, 122). These projects place control of Afghan women's lives in the hands of foreign military forces, international financial institutions, and donor agencies, and in so doing reinforce global power inequalities between the global north and south (Kandiyoti 2007b; Chistie 2010). The new form of global trusteeship in Afghanistan today is, in large part, made possible by the very figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman." As I have shown, this figure evicts Afghan

women from epistemic, moral, and political agency, and thus casts them exclusively as vulnerable victims in need of rescue, incapable of freedom of choice and control due to their illiteracy. By aligning all Afghan women with this figure, the new imperialism can therefore at once promise to assist women into political citizenship *and* deny these same women any democratic participation in decisions regarding what such help might involve or the possibility of declining help altogether. In the end, the "illiterate Third World woman," as the supposed beneficiary not only of Western protection but also of Western tutelage and guidance, is denied self-determination so that she can be vested with it through the literacy education bestowed by the West. In other words, within the neo-imperial imaginary, it is Western intervention alone that is embued with the power to enable her civic transformation into a political actor ready for self-government.

Hence, although the new imperialism has presented the Afghan war as a battle to rescue victimized women from barbarous masculinity of the Taliban, it shares with the Taliban (as well as with the Afghan government under Karzai and the warlords) the desire to limit and control the spaces for Afghan women's agency and voices (Agathangelou and Ling 2004). In the "invented traditions" of the Taliban's brand of religious fundamentalism,[59] Afghan women serve as symbols of faith and honour and must be protected from the encroachment of Western values (including literacy and education) (Chishti 2010). In contrast, Western imperial discourse depicts this barring of women from literacy as symbolic of women's victimization and of the legitimacy of, and necessity for, the West to "speak for women who are denied their rights to learn, to vote

[59] I borrow the phrase "invented traditions" from Hobsbawm and Ranger (1984).

or to live in freedom" (L. Bush 2005). Both, however, eclipse the historic presence of women as political actors.

This paternalistic and racialized politics of rescue and reform is evident not only in those projects that promise to politically empower Afghan women but also in the reconstruction efforts that seek to remake Afghanistan according to the imperatives of a neo-liberal market economy. Indeed, underlying the promise of Coalition leaders and multilateral agencies to be dispensing freedom and agency to the "illiterate Third World woman" through literacy education is a "neo-liberal rationality" that "involves extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action" and thus remaking all social relations according the principles of the market (Brown 2003a; see also Bakker 2007). This neo-liberal political rationality is especially evident in the adult literacy programs for women in Afghanistan developed after 2001. Indeed, since the outset of the Afghan war, women's literacy programs funded by the U.N., the World Bank, and U.S.A.I.D. have linked basic literacy education to some of the key pillars of neo-liberal development – such as training in microfinance management, self-help savings and investment groups, carpet weaving, agricultural production, and animal husbandry – as well as to more traditional gender roles for women, such as hygiene promotion and family literacy (Hunt and Rygeil 2006). Within these programs, literacy is positioned as a key requirement for Afghan women's economic empowerment, defined exclusively as escape from their victimization at the hands of individual men and entry into entrepreneurial enterprises, access to credit, and the ability to engage in wage labour (Wood 2001).

Since the late 1970s, when development experts and policy makers first "discovered" the "woman problem" in international development,[60] female literacy has been approached by international development agencies and international financial institutions as primarily a means of developing human capital, reducing women's fertility and infant mortality, increasing child well-being, and enabling women's successful entry into the formal economy (Arends-Kuenning and Amin 2001; Kabeer 2003; Robinson-Pant 2004, 2008).[61] In the wake of the debt crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, this approach became a key pillar of World Bank policy, in particular, as poor women in the global south were positioned within development discourse as underutilized resources whose productive and reproductive labour could make up for the cuts to social services that the Structural Adjustment Policies of international financial institutions imposed on countries of the global south.[62] Since 2000, this "efficiency approach" to women in development has informed the gender equality as "smart economics" framework adopted by the World Bank, World Economic Forum, large financial corporations, non-governmental organizations, and development agencies.[63] The smart economics framework suggests that investing in women's education, and enhancing their participation in and access to markets, is not simply an intrinsic good but will also enhance neo-liberal market-led forms of economic growth because women work harder and are more altruistic than men (Chant 2012).

[60] See Escobar (1995) and Marchand (1996).
[61] This approach is most clearly evinced in the landmark study by Elizabeth M. King and M. Anne Hill (1993), *Women's Education in Developing Countries: Barriers, Benefits and Policies*, commissioned by the World Bank.
[62] See Moser (1991); Chant (2012); Chant and Sweetman (2012); and Floro (2014).
[63] For critiques of the smart economics framework, see Chant (2012); Chant and Sweetman (2012); Roberts (2012); Roberts and Soederberg (2012); and Ellias (2013).

This "smart economics" approach to gender equality – which aims to increase women's efficiency as workers and mothers – is echoed in the Bush and Obama administrations' emphasis on literacy as the key to Afghan women's economic empowerment. The Bush administration positioned literacy as central to Afghan women's modernization and insertion into the global market-place through handicraft production (U.S. State Department 2006). The Obama administration has further entrenched this neo-liberal agenda: the U.S. State Department's 2010 Regional Stabilization Plan, U.S.A.I.D.'s 2011 Learning for Community Empowerment Program, and U.S.A.I.D.'s 2014 Promote (Promoting Gender Equity in National Priority Programs) all tie women's literacy training to community-based projects that help women develop vocational and business skills for agricultural and artisanal microenterprises and encourage their participation in micro-credit and self-help savings groups. Reflecting the neo-liberal emphasis on the market as the guarantor of human freedom and poverty reduction, these programs therefore not only teach women reading and writing skills. Their hidden curriculum also operates as a form of governmentality that hails "the illiterate Third World woman" to remake herself into the genderless entrepreneur and worker celebrated in both post-feminist discourse and smart economics, and thus to achieve freedom from traditional patriarchal constraints through participation in agricultural production and self-employment.

Yet, as decades of feminist research has demonstrated, the incorporation of women in the global south into the paid workforce in both home-based industries and export-processing zones has not resulted in their liberation from hierarchal gender

relations. While women's participation in the market economy may shift familial power imbalances, the conditions in which they work in agro- and manufacturing industries tend to be highly exploitative and have caused of the worldwide "feminization of poverty" (Kabeer 2005). Research suggests that Afghan women working in the production of carpets, poppy, and dried fruit and nuts for export occupy the lowest rung of the Afghan labour market (Lister and Pain 2004). In addition, microcredit schemes promise to bring women into development as independent, self-reliant actors by extending small loans to them; yet, while credit is often championed as offering women greater economic security, it is ultimately a form of debt that exposes them to greater risk and deepens the reach of the financial service industry into non-capitalist societies (Narayan 2005; Keating, Rasmussen and Rishi 2010). Moreover, as Pupavac (2005) notes of microcredit schemes in post-conflict Bosnia, such programs are consonant with the neo-liberal doctrine of privatization of state welfare provisions. Microcredit produces a population expected to rely primarily on private resources for survival rather than on state programs, while the workplaces produced through such schemes (such as the home or small business) remain unregulated. Although micro-enterprises may help some women survive, the limited income made through hairdressing businesses or handicrafts is a sign, not of women's empowerment, but rather of "disguised unemployment" and of women's increased economic burden and insecurity in the new post-war economy (Pupavac 2005, 402; Schmeidl 2009; Seifert 2009).

At the same time as literacy has been proffered as the pathway to Afghan women's entrance into paid labour and their freedom from traditional gendered

constraints, it also has been frequently invoked in ways that reinforce the gendered division of labour within the household. For instance, while Bush's March 2002 Radio Address to the Nation positioned literacy as "the pathway to progress, particularly for women," this progress was equated with their improved mothering skills; repeating the existing orthodoxy in development studies that links maternal literacy to childhood development, Bush suggested that "babies born to educated women are more likely to be immunized, better nourished, and survive their first year. Educated women encourage their children to be educated, as well" (Bush 2002b). In the context of Afghanistan, where the infrastructure for health services and education has been destroyed by decades of war, and public sector job cuts have been imposed as part of the institutional reform package developed by international financial institutions, this promise of producing better mothers through literacy downloads the responsibility for social reproduction exclusively onto unpaid labour of individual women (Kandioyti 2007b).

Literacy policies and programs for Afghan women therefore are central to those processes of "accumulation by dispossession" that David Harvey (2003) suggests characterize the latest phase of capitalism (67). These processes involve opening up new areas for accumulation through the marketization of labour and resources that were previously outside the realm of the market, and the production of new subjects reliant solely on the market for their survival. As I have shown, neo-liberal literacy policies in Afghanistan aim to remake the Afghan woman into what Katherine Rankin (2001) calls the "rational economic woman" who is adaptable to the whims of global capital (20). Unlike the helpless and dependent "illiterate Third World woman," the new Afghan

woman promised to emerge from literacy programs is envisioned as an autonomous and self-regulating subject who assumes responsibility for herself and her community, and acts as the agent of her own transformation from a traditional to a modern life. This politics of responsibilization – what Sylivia Chant (2006) calls the "feminization of responsibility and obligation" (206) – places the onus for Afghanistan's development on the shoulders of individual Afghan women, who must pull themselves into modernity through self-help. Hence, just as post-feminist discourse in the West hails "top girls" to continually remake themselves according to the demands of market self-reliance, post-war reconstruction and development policies in Afghanistan similarly seek to constitute Afghan women "as agents of their own care under neo-liberalism and an enduring war" (Nguyen 2011, 377).

My concern with the manner in which literacy is framed within post-war reconstruction policies aimed at Afghan women's political and economic empowerment is therefore not that they provide women with skills necessary for civic life, economic survival, or participation in their children's education. Rather, the problem with these policies and the new form of global trusteeship they embody is that, while promising empowerment, they ultimately seek to render Afghan women politically docile in a post-interventionary setting and economically useful for global capitalism (Seifert 2009). Such policies position the "illiterate Third World woman" as a deficient political and economic subject who cannot represent herself and requires Western tutelage in the norms of liberated femininity. As such, reconstruction efforts not only undermine Afghan women's agency and the knowledge accrued from surviving decades of conflict. They are also

depoliticizing: they transform the difficult work of establishing egalitarian gender relations in Afghanistan into a technical problem best addressed by "curriculum decided elsewhere" rather than through feminist political action (Duffield 2007, 8; Whitworth 2004).

V. Conclusion

Although the figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" has been continually called upon to authorize the G.W.O.T. abroad and normalize a new post-feminist sexual-racial contract in the West, the politics of the new imperialism contains very little discursive space for Afghan women to appear as epistemic, moral, and political subjects. As Mary Anne Franks (2003) notes, "[w]omen are invoked, but are not present, in this latest international conflict" (137). Produced through a series of simulacric, overdetermined scripts and circulating as a free-floating signifier within the neo-imperial imaginary, the figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" is "overburdened with meaning" (Khanna 2008, 104): she is a metonym both for the misogynistic anti-modernisim of the Taliban and for female helplessness; a symbol of the absolute difference between the anti-feminist East and the post-feminist West; a "negative female ideal" in relation to which Western women can be celebrated as free and no longer in need of feminism (Kahf 1999, 7); and the target of Western-led post-war reconstruction projects that seek to transform Afghan women into modern, self-governing subjects through literacy instruction. Nowhere within such scripts is there space for Afghan women to define their own relationship to literacy and education or to testify to

their war-inflicted traumas, suffering, anger, and resistance under both indigenous patriarchy and the G.W.O.T. (Khattak 2004).

This is not to imply that Afghan women are always and everywhere silent. As Lewis Gordon (2007) suggests, critical theorists need to be vigilant against conflating "the aims of a symbolic structure with their achievement" (10). While neo-imperial narratives of women's literacy may occlude the epistemic, moral, and political agency of the women of which they speak, this agency can never be completely cancelled or eliminated: it is present in the intersubjective and political relations that these women establish between and among themselves and within their communities. Rather than deny this agency, my intention in this chapter has been to instead uncover the paternalistic and patriarchal politics that undergirds the new imperialism's claim that the G.W.O.T. is a war to rescue Afghan women from the barbarism of "illiterate" Afghan men. This chapter has shown how the reduction of Afghan women's lives to the monolithic figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" is itself a form of violence. Inhabiting what Gayatri Spivak (1988) refers to as the "aporia between subject and object status" (306), the "illiterate Third World woman" condemns Afghan women to a double death sentence: it consigns them to a "figural death from the realm of the political" while simultaneously justifying their literal death by war, occupation, and displacement (Masters 2009, 44).

Furthermore, my aim has been to challenge the neo-imperial representation of the West as absent of misogyny and to demonstrate its complicity in the very relations of gender power it promises to oppose. Linking the hypervisiblity of the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" in the neo-imperial imaginary to both the Afghan war

and changing gender politics in Western societies, I have highlighted those points of similarity between the seemingly divergent histories and experiences of Western and Afghan women that are foreclosed within the discourse of "the West and the Rest." Neo-imperial discourse appropriates and disavows both Western and Afghan feminisms, portraying feminism as dead in the West but not yet fully developed in the non-West. In so doing, it incites, albeit in different ways, both Western and Afghan women to become self-governing subjects of post-feminist success, and thus to remake their lives according to the dictates of neo-liberal capitalism. The new imperialism therefore is part and parcel of a mode of governing or ruling the global population of women in ways that shape their subjectivities, conduct, and desires according to neo-liberalism's individualizing ethos and limited concept of market-based freedom.

My analysis of neo-imperial discourses of the "literacy crisis" of Afghan women thus reveals that the G.W.O.T. has promised to "liberate" Afghan women only by subjecting them to a new form of paternalist trusteeship that seeks to reengineer gender relations from above and to bring literacy to them. Yet, as Ann Tickner (1992) notes, "the achievement of peace, economic justice, and ecological sustainability is inseparable from overcoming social relations of subordination; genuine security requires not only the absence of war but also the elimination of unjust social relations," including those of militarized humanitarianism and neo-liberal global capitalism (128). However, movement away from the complicity of literacy in such projects of imperial domination requires that we pay attention not only to the mechanisms by which Afghan women's agency is foreclosed in neo-imperial narratives and reconstruction projects. We must also explore

how the current furore over Afghan women's literacy crisis is part of a larger history of the imbrication of literacy in colonial projects, and how it recasts and replays a hidden arsenal of tropes and conceptual frameworks that have their roots in the archive of colonial knowledge production. It is to these hidden legacies of colonialism that I now turn.

CHAPTER TWO

WRITING AT THE LIMITS OF HUMANITY: THE COLONIALITY OF LITERACY AND THE NECROPOLITCS OF SALVATION

Narratives of a "literacy crisis," such as the ones I outlined in the previous chapter, are not unique to the social and political imaginary of the new imperialism. Literacy was also central to colonial imaginaries that developed as part of European projects of imperial expansion from the Renaissance to the period from 1875 to 1914, which Eric Hobsbawn (1987) calls the "Age of Empire." These projects were part of the original process of "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2003, 67). The natural resources, bullion, and labour that Europeans expropriated from the colonies through robbery, slavery, and genocide served as the foundation for the emerging capitalist order in Europe (Marx 1990). This form of primitive accumulation – which, as Marx noted, was "written in the annals of mankind in the letters of blood and fire" (875) – relied on modes of social differentiation that expunged the colonized from the category of the human (McNally 2006). This eviction of colonized peoples from humanity gave credence to the fiction that colonial conquest was not a regime of violence and murder, but was instead primarily a civilizing and humanizing mission (Said 1994; Dussel 2000; Razack 2004).

Literacy was central both to this dehumanization of Europe's colonial others and to its self-construction as a bastion of civilization during this original phase of European imperialism, as it has been to every phase thereafter. Indeed, the idea that imperial expansion and territorial control over foreign lands involved the spread of literacy (or a form of Western alphabetic literacy that came to stand-in for all other forms of literacy) to supposedly illiterate and uneducated peoples was historically a key feature of

European depictions of colonialism as a mission of bringing civilization to the barbarian, salvation and racial uplift to those whom Fanon (1963) called *les damnés de la terre*, and, more recently, modernity to the traditional and the underdeveloped.

This historic alliance of literacy and imperialism requires careful charting if we are to fully understand why literacy has achieved such political valence and choral uptake in the neo-imperial imaginary. In the previous chapter, I suggested that neo-imperial narratives of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" have been successful in securing public consent for war because they exclude Afghan women from epistemic, political, and moral subjectivity and instead transform them into objects of imperial knowledge and rescue. Here I add to that analysis by proposing that part of the reason the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" has achieved such currency in the present-day is because it recycles a long history of colonial discourse. This history is hidden and rendered invisible in neo-imperial narratives that portray the "crisis of literacy" of Afghan women as a "state of emergency" requiring foreign military intervention.[64] Yet, this "crisis" about which such a furor has been invoked in the neo-imperial imaginary is not the exception but the norm when seen from the *longue durée* of colonial history.

A feminist project of decolonizing literacies therefore needs to historicize the present and explore how colonial discourses about literacy that circulated "then and there" – in the imaginaries of the newly-formed Europe of the Renaissance and

[64] For a discussion of how the "politics of emergency" mitigates against historical understanding so that the crisis and responses to it can be portrayed as new, see Edkins (1997), Malkki (1996), and Branch (2011).

Enlightenment – reappear "here and now" (Alexander 2005, 192). Such a genealogical approach draws attention to what M. Jacqui Alexander (2005) calls the "palimpsestic character of time" (190): to the multiple pasts that interrupt the present. As a method of history writing, genealogy is therefore less concerned with producing a detailed account of the past than with "understanding the past to speak the present," as Walter Mignolo (2003) puts it (455). There are certain dangers that accompany genealogical investigations. Michael Banton (2000), for instance, rightly advises historians of the present to guard against the pitfalls of presentism: of reading the past as a reflection of the conventions and attitudes of the present-day, and thus of ignoring the changing historical contexts and shifts in meaning associated with cultural categories and practices, such as literacy. Yet, as Alexander (2005) notes, attention to the multiple temporalities that constitute the present does not necessarily entail collapsing different historical moments into one another. It does, however, allow us to understand how today's neo-imperial order is mapped onto an older colonial one, how the present is subject to a history of which we are not necessarily aware, a history that repeats in the present-day, but in ways that might differ from the past. Indeed, it is only by acknowledging the recursive, belated, and repetitious time of history that we can begin to work through the ways in which "[t]he traditions of all the dead generations weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living" (Marx 1978c, 595).

Such a method of confronting the present with images of its forgotten colonial past is necessary not only to challenge the colonial amnesia that undergirds neo-imperial narratives of benevolent Westerners saving Afghan women through literacy. It is also

needed to uncover the silences in scholarly accounts of literacy's place within the history of modernity. Most scholarship on the European transition from the Middle Ages to modernity posits Western alphabetic literacy – along with the advent of the printing press, the rise of vernacular languages in book publishing, the demise of Latin's hegemony of Latin, and the emergence of Protestantism – as one condition for the possibility of Europe's journey toward Enlightenment, liberal democratic government, and the formation of modern nation-states (Mignolo 1994; Ferguson 2003; Graff 1979, 1995). Yet, as Margaret Ferguson (2003) points out, the pride-of-place granted to literacy within the academic disciplines of the West and the long-standing association of modernity with literacy have tended to render invisible literacy's place in imperialism.

Ferguson (2003) notes that literacy historically became a "definitional and political problem" for European men of letters and intellectuals only with the emergence of modern imperialism (31). The question of what cultures could be considered literate and what ones oral was first expressed and addressed in the colonial encounter, as Europeans met peoples with different signifying practices than their own (Mignolo 2003). By failing to address the concomitant rise of literacy and empire in Europe after 1492, scholarly accounts of literacy as progress bolster what Mignolo (2007) calls "the myth of modernity" (454): literacy is pointed to as evidence of emancipation from clerical authority and as an expression of reason, while its deployment as a tool of colonial domination is hidden and forgotten. As a consequence, these accounts conceal the extent to which the emergence of European modernity – and the privilege it accorded to Western alphabetic literacy – was dependent upon European colonial expansion, and

therefore cannot be understood apart from it. As Escobar (2007) suggests, "there is no modernity without coloniality" (185). In other words, coloniality, as the "underside of modernity," is constitutive of it (Dussel 1996, 2000).

While Chapter One highlighted the continuities between neo-imperial narratives of the literacy crisis of Afghan women and older colonial discourses of victimized Muslim women, this chapter re-reads the Westernized history of literacy from the perspective of its "underside" – the side of coloniality. In so doing, it traces how the neo-imperial concern with Afghan women's literacy, while seemingly novel, is actually rooted in a series of what Zillah Eisenstein (2004) calls "befores" and "alreadys," and thus remains bound to older colonial categories of literacy, race, and culture (xv). My contention in this chapter is that narratives of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" victimized by illiterate and "dangerous Muslim men" provide fodder for the new imperialism because they derive their authority from and recast a dense set of assumptions about literacy, and its superiority over other communicative practices (most notably orality), that have been at the heart of Western knowledge production since the late fifteenth century. This tradition equates the acquisition of Western alphabetic literacy with civilization, modernity, and progress – the general standards for which "the West took to be its own values universalized" (Goldberg 1993, 4). At the same time, it constitutes orality as the bastion of ignorance, lawlessness, bestiality, and tradition.

As the lexicon of colonial power changed, different attributes came to be assigned to the communicative practices of literacy and orality over the 500 years of Western colonial domination. However, the methods through which the division between the

literate and the oral have been secured remain constant and are rooted in what Mignolo (2003) calls the "the logic of coloniality" that has structured global relations since 1492 (442). This logic operates through techniques of classification, hierarchy, identity and difference, and differential exclusion to "divide the world's population into two groups – superior and inferior, rational and irrational, primitive and civilized, traditional and modern" (Lugones 2007, 192) – and "to rank them in relation to the invisible matrix provided by the enunciator that naturalizes and justifies the domination" of those deemed inferior (Mignolo 2003, 441).[65]

Over time, as I shall show, this "logic of coloniality" made it possible for the literate to be differentiated from the oral; literate cultures to be granted a higher position on the hierarchy of humankind; literacy to be defined as an exclusive property of European, white men and orality construed as an inferior mode of communication shared by children, European women, indigenous peoples, and African slaves; literate and oral communicative practices to be taken as *the* defining characteristics of so-called modern and traditional communities respectively; and those deemed oral to be excluded from the bounds of human community all together.

The division between the literate and the oral was therefore never simply an indicator of differences in communicative practices. Rather, as a constitutive feature of the normative Western definition of what it means to be human – a definition that is inflected not only by racial but also by gender, sexual, generational, and species hierarchies – it operated to constitute the limits of the human – and thus to mark certain

[65] For a discussion of these techniques, see Goldberg (1993).

groups of people as infrahuman (on the boundaries of humanity) or inhuman. As I outline in what follows, this division sanctioned the regime of colonial and racial terror, which, as Michael Taussig (1991) points out, was "the mediator par excellence of colonial hegemony" and constituted "the space of death where the Indian, African, and white gave birth to the New World" (5). Yet, colonial powers also promised that the colonized could enter into a common humanity with the colonizer – and thus be offered salvation from the death and destruction of empire – through literacy instruction – the content of which, however, always remained under the control of the colonizer. This salvation, I argue, was therefore another form of violence. While more quotidian than outright regimes of terror, salvation projects were nevertheless part and parcel of what Mbembe (2003) calls the necropolitics of colonialism, which "dictated who may live and who must die" (11). Salvation and terror worked in tandem to compel the submission of those deemed infrahuman to regimes of colonial and racialized power (Mbembe 2003; Razack 2008), to justify the torture and death of those who were believed to lack letters, and to resecure what Sylvia Wynter (2003) calls the "coloniality of being" or the "overrepresentation" of the white bourgeois definition of "Man" as if it were the only conception of the human (260).

Tracing these vicissitudes of literacy, this chapter explores how its deployment as a marker of both difference *and* sameness worked simultaneously to uphold the system of Western superiority and reproduce an "order of white dominance" on a global scale (Goldberg 2002, 196). In what follows, I revisit three historical moments when literacy was deployed to demarcate the difference between the human and those evicted from

humanity and in need of salvation through literacy instruction: the Spanish colonization of the Americas; the anti-black racism of the U.S. slave system; and the modernizing project of sociolinguistics and anthropology. These projects are marked by their own distinct geographic and temporal contexts, and thus cannot stand-in for the entire history of literacy. Yet, despite their specificity and contextual richness, some of the issues that emerged within these projects can help elucidate the current entanglements of literacy and empire. In these colonial projects and our current neo-imperial one, the "illiterate" other is situated in a liminal zone between subjecthood and objecthood, human and non-human, at once promised and denied entry into the modern through a "structure of permanent deferral" in which the native, the slave, the "traditional man," and the "illiterate Third World woman" are cast as too fundamentally different ever to be deemed equal and granted full personhood (Wilder in Li 2007, 15).

I. The Invention of Literacy and Colonization in the Americas

If modernity is approached, not as an "intra-European" phenomenon, but as "one constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content," then the origins of modernity must be located, not at the end of the eighteenth century with the Enlightenment, but earlier: with the conquest of the Americas in 1492; the reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, and their expulsion of the Moors and Jews from the region earlier that year; and the control of the Atlantic by Spain and Portugal in the early modern period (Dussel quoted in Mignolo 2007, 454; Mignolo 2003; Gordon 2007). Taking Spanish and Portuguese colonialism as the starting point for the study of modernity draws attention to the Americas as the initial

"other side" of modernity (Escobar 2007, 184). It thereby highlights the role that the exploitation and expropriation of its lands, resources, and peoples played in creating the modern world system.

Most scholarly accounts of modernity tend to overlook this role of Spain and Portugal in the creation of the modern era and focus instead on Northern Europe – a focus that is itself a product of the shift in the geography of European power from the Catholic South to Northern Calvinist and Protestant Europe in the mid-seventeenth century (Mignolo 2003; Escobar 2007). Yet, it is in this "first modernity" that the modernity/coloniality relationship, a relationship that continues to the present-day, was initially worked out (Escobar 2007, 184). As Mignolo (2003) suggests, the Spanish "discovery" of a part of the world they did not know about before 1492 – and their encounter with the cultural difference of the Amerindian peoples they met – forced them to re-think their concept of humanity (430). The indigenous peoples of the Americas did not fit into the secular history of the Spanish Renaissance, which traced the origins of Castile back to ancient Greece. Nor could their existence be explained within the Biblical narratives of world. The "discovery" of the Americas thus bespoke the "discontinuity of the classical tradition," Mignolo (2003, 46) proposes, and led to a redefinition of the human that "would remain the matrix of modernity: a concept of humanity based on racial criteria" (431). Not able to conceive of other ways of being human, the Spanish Renaissance man of letters took his own local construction of the "human" to be "isomorphic" with what it means to be human (Wynter 2003, 310). All those who fell outside this definition were excluded from the realm of the human and classified as

subhuman or infrahuman, a position occupied in the Western imagination most forcefully by the cultural and racial others of the non-West.

Colonial narratives of the difference between the Spanish and the Amerindian groups they colonized often appealed to the distinction between literate cultures and those without letters to justify the subordinate cultural and racial status granted to the colonized under conditions of colonial rule and occupation. The coloniality of Western alphabetic literacy is at the heart of Mignolo's (2003) *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*. Mignolo reads the Spanish Renaissance from the perspective of its "darker side" – its colonies – and thus rethinks conventional scholarship on the Renaissance to account for Western colonial expansion (Mignolo 2003, 15). In his discussion of early Spanish writings about languages, Mignolo demonstrates that the privileging of European letters and literacy that characterized Spanish humanistic studies and philosophy of language at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century was also central to the Spanish colonization of the Americas, and was key to its constitution of the colonial difference between the Spanish and the Amerindians.

Mignolo (2003) focuses primarily on the works of Elio Antonio de Nebrija, who is responsible for bringing humanistic studies to Spain. In the same year that Columbus arrived in the Americas, Nebrija published the first grammar of the Spanish language, *Gramática de la lengua castellana* (1492). This grammar was central to the territorial organization of what is now known as Spain, Mignolo (2003) suggests, because it brought together the various Castilian dialects and attributed to them a status previously accorded only to Latin. Mignolo (2003) maintains that Nebrija's grammar aided not only

in the consolidation of a Spanish vernacular and of a unified Spanish nation; it was also key to Spanish imperial expansion in both the "Old" and "New" World. This colonizing dimension of the *Gramática* is evinced in an anecdote related in its prologue, in which Nebrija reminds his patron, Queen Isabella, of the necessity for a grammar of the Spanish language. When the Queen was first presented with a draft of the grammar, she asked him to defend its purpose. Nebrija recounts that:

> Upon this the Bishop of Avila interrupted to answer in my stead. What he said was this: 'Soon Your Majesty will have placed her yoke upon many barbarians who speak outlandish tongues. By this, your victory, these people shall stand in a new need; the need for the laws the victor owes to the vanquished, and the need for the language we shall bring with us.' My grammar shall serve to impart them the Castilian tongue, as we have used grammar to teach Latin to our young (Nebrija in Mignolo 2003, 38).

As Mignolo (2003) points out, according to Nejibra's philosophy of language, only the alphabetic letter had the power to "control the mobility and flow of speech" and thus to "tame" the voices of those considered barbarians by Christian Spain (29).[66] Whereas pictographic signs may be interpreted in multiple ways, alphabetic writing fixes and stabilizes meaning.[67] This fixity, as Mignolo (2003) suggests, would enable Spain to

[66] As Eric Wolf (1994) explains, the early modern definition of barbarians as lacking language or can be traced to the cosmological order of the ancient Greeks, who classified those who lived outside the city-state as *barbarphonia*, or bar-bar-speakers.

[67] According to Mignolo (1994), the separation of writing from drawing that was the hallmark of the early modern Spanish philosophy of language was largely a product of the European Renaissance and the invention of the printing press. While writing and drawing had been connected in European medieval illuminated books, they became detached with the invention of the printing press.

impose what Bakhtin (1991) calls the centripetal force of a unitary language on the many different languages of the "barbarians" in the Iberian peninsula, an imposition that Nebrija suggests would be necessary for their colonization and subjugation.

At the heart of the philosophy of language elaborated in Nebrija's *Gramática* is the "celebration" of the alphabetic letter, and the belief in the superiority of the letter over all other writing systems (Mignolo 2003, 76, 42). Mignolo (2003) shows that, while this philosophy of language was written primarily to enable the unification of Castile and the extension of Isabella and Ferdinand's power over the Moor-controlled Granada, it also provided the framework through which the Spanish viewed Amerindian writing systems and culture during the colonization of the Americas. As a consequence, despite the presence of multiple signifying systems and writing practices (such as oral traditions and picto-ideographic writing systems) among the indigenous peoples they met, the Spanish colonizers identified literacy exclusively with the European practice of alphabetic writing and its privileged "sign carrier" – the European printed book – the presence of which they saw as the "measures of civilization" (Mignolo 2003, 121, 118). They therefore portrayed indigenous writing practices as just so many forms of illiteracy that had to be changed. By classifying writing practices that were foreign to them as non-writing, Spanish scholars and colonialists thereby elided the "material differences" in the modes of writing that characterized Spanish and Amerindians cultures (Mignolo 2003, 75).

Moreover, implicit in the Spanish philosophy of language, Mignolo (2003) notes, was the notion that the European book served as the sole medium in which history could be recorded and through which "truth could be discerned from falsehood" (122). For the

Spanish, the book served as evidence of the possibility for intellectual progress and advancement, while other methods of recording history – such as the Mexica *amoxtli* (a fabric or skin upon which narratives were painted), the Andean quipu (a method of record-keeping made up of branches), or oral narratives recounted by elders – were depicted merely as modes of "story-telling" and thus as unverifiable because they were not encoded in a book.

This construction of alphabetic literacy and its sign carrier – the book – as the hallmarks of civilization made it possible for the Spanish to construct the Amerindian populations they conquered not as only "people without letters," but also as "people without history" and thus without cultural achievement (Mignolo 2003, 3). These peoples would thus need to be brought literacy and have their histories written for them by the Spanish. The privileging of the alphabet as the sole legitimate writing system therefore positioned the Amerindians as inferior and barbarous in relation to their colonizers, whose literacy was seen to offer exclusive access to history, knowledge, and law, and thus to civilization and humanity.[68] The historic role of literacy in the colonization of the Americas therefore gives credence to Bill Ashcroft's (2001) observation that "for imperialism, the idea of literacy and education, even when these were imposed on already literate societies, represented a defining separation between civilized and barbarous nations" (39).

[68] The association of literacy with civility (*civilitas*), and the lack of letters with barbarism, is most clearly expressed, as Mignolo (2003) claims, in Bernardo de Aldrette's *Origenes de la langue castellane*, which suggested that the Amerindians were naked and therefore uncivilized solely because they did not have alphabetic literacy.

The Spanish colonization of the Americas was thus in large part justified by what Mignolo (2003), following Johannes Fabian, calls "the denial of coevalness" between the alphabetic literacy of the Spanish colonizers and the signifying systems of the indigenous peoples they colonized (xi). This denial involved the substitution of space as the primary axis for measuring cultural difference by that of time: the interpretation of the signifying systems of the Amerindians as pre-historical was part and parcel of the construction by the Spanish of the colonized as existing not only in a different geographic and thus cultural space, but also in a "permanently anterior time," to borrow Anne McClintock's (1995, 30) phrase, that reflected an earlier stage of human development before the advent of alphabetic literacy. The Spanish hence appealed primarily to differences in communicative practices in order to classify and rank different peoples upon a hierarchy of human societies and along a temporal axis of development.

Mignolo (2003) notes that while Spanish missionaries and statesmen had different motivations for teaching alphabetic literacy to the Amerindian peoples, they shared a similar goal: to convert the Amerindians to European ways of life, and thus to enable their historical progression.[69] The missionaries sought to Christianize them through evangelical teaching of the scriptures; the Mendicant friars and the Jesuits, in particular, believed that conversion could be hastened by writing grammars of the Amerindian languages and translating the Bible into these languages. In contrast to the missionaries, and sometimes in direct conflict with them, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries

[69] For a discussion of the role of Western alphabetic literacy in the inculcation of a Westernized habitus amongst indigenous peoples of what is now called Canada, and the replacement of their symbolic literacy with a Western sequential one, see Donaldson (1998).

the Spanish kings promoted the "Castilianization" of the Amerindians and the teaching of Castilian to them in order to consolidate colonial territorial expansion (Mignolo 2003, 52). Wynter (2003) calls this their secularized "plan of salvation" (288). Yet, whether their purpose was religious conversion or political domination, the Spanish religious and secular authorities believed that the inferior situation of the indigenous peoples could be ameliorated only by colonizing their languages and by teaching alphabetic literacy to them through European forms of education. However, as Mignolo (2003) points out, despite the pride-of-place granted to Western alphabetic literacy in the Spanish colonial imaginary, the spread of Western literacy was not automatic and the Castilian language became the dominant language in New Spain only in the neo-colonial period; the colonization of languages was therefore "a massive operation in which the materiality and ideology of Amerindian semiotic interactions were intermingled with…the materiality and ideology of Western reading and writing cultures," a process that Mignolo (2003) refers to as "colonial semiosis" (76).

The denigration of the different writing and reading practices and modes of transmitting history and knowledge of the Amerindians, and the epistemic domination and subalternization of Amerindian knowledges effected by the Spanish theory of writing, cannot be separated from the expropriation of their lands and bodies: the inferior cultural and intellectual status assigned to the Amerindians sanctioned and naturalized the plundering of their resources, the destruction of their autonomy and communal relations, and their enslavement by the Spanish to work in the gold and silver mines of the New World and to produce the bullion that would finance Spain's European territorial

expansion. Western alphabetic literacy was therefore central to the Spanish enclosures of the lands, bodies, and social relations of the indigenous peoples they encountered in the New World, even though these colonizing processes were met with resistance and thus were never compete.

II. Cannibalism and the Bestiality of Orality

Early colonial narratives of literacy classified the indigenous peoples of the Americas as without writing, and thereby evicted them from the realms of history and knowledge. Moreover, by foreclosing the presence of indigenous writing systems, and constructing the cultures of the indigenous peoples of the Americas as primarily "oral," these narratives also portrayed the colonized as outside the bounds of moral community and humanity through the longstanding association of orality with cannibalism in the colonial imagination. As Peter Hulme (1986) suggests, cannibalism frequently appears in colonial narratives as the defining marker of the subhumanity and primitivism of the colonized, reflecting the "general European disposition for finding cannibalism in all non-European parts of the world," including pre-Columbian America, the Pacific, and Africa (85). Over the last several decades, the topic of cannibalism or *anthropophagi* has been the subject of heated debates in the field of anthropology, especially after the anthropologist William Arens (1979) suggested that institutionalized cannibalism was never practiced (Hulme 1998; Lindenbaum 2004). More recently, anthropologists studying the Americas, Africa, and Melanesia, as well as some European societies, have suggested that cannibalism did sometimes occur in the form of ritual sacrifice, if not as a source of food, in different historical periods and geographic locations (Lindenbaum 2004). Yet, regardless of

whether institutionalized cannibalism ever did occur, studies of the colonial archive reveal that cannibalism existed in the colonial imaginary, at the very least, as the ultimate expression of orality for many centuries.

Indeed, postcolonial counternarratives of cannibalism suggest that the word "cannibal" has its origins in Columbus's second voyage to the Caribbean in 1493 and his contact with the Taino of the Greater Antilles (Hulme 1986; Lindenbaum 2004). Most Eurocentric histories of the Carribean tell of an ongoing war between two indigenous peoples – the supposedly peaceful Tainos and the more hostile "Caribs" (a construct used to identify the indigenous groups of lowland South America and the West Indies) – and trace the origins of the noun "cannibal" to *caniba*, the word the Taino are said to have used to describe what they saw as the extreme ferocity and barbarity their enemies, the "Caribe" (Keegan 1996). Yet, William Keegan's (1996) analysis of Columbus's diary reveals that the words "caniba," "cannibale," and "Caribe" do not derive from the historic realities of the Antilles. They instead have their linguistic sources in separate European and Taino mythologies, which combined in the colonial encounter to produce the people who came to be associated with the "Caribes" as cannibals. According to Keegan, the "Caribe" are creatures who existed only in Taino mythology, as the polar opposites of the valued behaviour of the Taino, and thus did not refer to the people that the Spanish named "Caribs." While the Spanish took the word "Caribe" to be the name the Taino gave to their rivals who had been raiding their villages, and believed these rivals to be those groups the Spanish labelled as Carib, Keegan shows that the Taino actually believed that the Spanish were the embodiments of the mythical "Caribe" because they

possessed similar physical attributes (clothing and armaments) and engaged in similar behaviours (taking away captives who never returned) as the "Caribe" (21). Moreover, Keegan observes that "caniba" is not a Taino word, but rather is the name that Columbus used in his diary to refer to the subjects of the *gran Can* (Grand Khan) of *Cathay* (China), whom Columbus had originally hoped to meet on his journey and whom he thought the mythical "Caribes" of Taino mythology to be. Frank Lestringant (1997) further suggests that, since Columbus never encountered any "real" Caribs, his descriptions of the man-eating cannibals he thought inhabited the New World should be read for their reliance on older European stories of anthropophages and on European mythologies of two monstrous races of the Middle Ages: the one-eyed Cyclops and the Cynocephali or dog-headed man. It is through this confluence of indigenous and European mythologies that the Caribs came to be identified within the colonial imaginary as exemplars of the culture of cannibals that characterized the New World.

The historic emergence of motifs of cannibalism in the colonial imaginary is significant because it marks a shift in European descriptions of the colonized from images of "noble savages," who could be converted to Christianity through education, to a new regime of representation that portrayed them primarily as barbarians and idolaters, who resisted colonization and would not be converted to Christianity unless through force and enslavement (Lindenbaum 2004). The term cannibalism never referred solely to "eating human flesh"; it always also signified "the commission of unspeakable crimes involving the use of human flesh and blood" (Hulme 1986, 85). It therefore aligned oral modes of communication with barbarity and bestiality, and thereby justified the

enslavement of peoples deemed "oral." That cannibalism and the absence of alphabetic literacy were often linked in early colonial narratives, and together offered a rationale for colonial violence as means to Christianize the "Indians," is exemplified in the dispute at Valladolid in 1550. Convened by the Spanish King Charles V, this debate centred on the problem of whether Spain had the right to wage war against and enslave the indigenous peoples of the Americas in order to rule them before it tried to Christianize them (Hanke 1959). On one side of this debate was the Dominican missionary priest Bartolomé de Las Casas, who argued that only peaceful persuasion should be used by Christians to convert the Amerindians; on the other was the Aristotelian scholar, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, who contended that wars against the Amerindians were just and constituted a necessary precondition for their Christianization because they lacked alphabetic literacy and were cannibals (Hanke 1959). As Wynter (2003) suggests, the debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda was grounded in the emerging division in European thought between two different views of the human: the Christian theocentric conception based on the distinction between the redeemed, the redeemable, and the unredeemable and the Renaissance secularist redescription of the human as distinct from the subhuman.[70] The debate was therefore an ontological one, in that it focused on the questions of what kind of beings the Amerindians were, of the degree of their humanity, and of whether they had "the capacity for Christianity and European civilization" (Hanke 1959, 6).

[70] Eric Wolf (1994) suggests that the Christian distinction between the redeemed, the redeemable, and the unredeemable was grafted onto the ancient classification of the civilized, the barbarians, and the monstrous races.

In his *Apologetic History of the Indies*, from which he drew during his dispute with Sepúlveda, Las Casas (1971) protested against the violence of the Spanish *conquistadores*, and their enslavement of indigenous peoples in the mines and plantations of the "New World." In his *History*, Las Casas proposed that while indigenous peoples could be classified as barbarians due to their ignorance of Christianity, they were not "true" barbarians because they adhered to the principles of natural reason. Rather, they should be considered human because they have complex systems of governance and religious observance. According to Las Casas, the "true" barbarians – whom he called "contrary" barbarians – are only those peoples who have rejected Christianity (Brunstetter 2012). Since the indigenous peoples of the Americas never had the Gospel preached to them, Las Casas suggested, they could not have renounced Christianity. They therefore could not be classified as "true" barbarians against whom the Spanish could wage a just war. For Las Casas, the Amerindians were therefore redeemable and had the capacity to be civilized through pacific religious conversion and education (Hanke 1959). He therefore concluded that the wars against them were unjust.[71]

For the disputation at Valladolid, the royal historian and defender of the Spanish settlers in the "New World," Sepúlveda, composed a treatise, *On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians*, to prove that wars against the "Indians" were just. As Lewis Hanke's (1959) influential study of the centrality of Aristotle's political theory to early

[71] Yet, while many scholars associate Las Casas's defense of the Indians with the origins of modern human rights discourse, it is important to note that his defense was not formulated in dialogue with the indigenous peoples of the Americas and depended instead on their capacity to assimilate to Christianity and abandon their own cultural traditions, a process that Daniel R. Brunstetter (2012) refers to as "cultural othercide" (71). At the same time, while he argued against the enslavement of indigenous peoples, Las Casas did not initially oppose the use by the Spanish of African slaves in the plantations and mines (Rattansi 2007).

modern Spanish thought shows, in this treatise Sepúlveda applied to the Amerindians the doctrine of natural slavery developed by Aristotle in his *Politics*. This doctrine holds that a certain segment of the population is destined by nature to be slaves to another segement, who by nature are free men. Sepúlveda argued that indigenous peoples were natural slaves to the Spaniards because they lacked reason, sociality, human governance and, not surprisingly, letters; they therefore were more akin to beasts than humans, a bestiality most forcefully symbolized in their acts cannibalism and what he viewed as their sexual licentiousness. Sepúlveda located in such supposed bestiality and inhumane customs the source of the indigenous peoples' obligation to serve the Spaniards and of the Crown's right to wage just war against the indigenous peoples should they fail to recognize the natural superiority of the Spaniards (Hanke 1959). As Sepúlveda (1991) remarks in his *On the Reasons for the Just War among the Indians*:

> Now compare these natural qualities of judgment, talent, magnanimity, temperance, humanity, and religion [of the Spaniards] with those of these pitiful men [the Indians], in whom *you will scarcely find any vestiges of humanness*. These people possess neither science nor even an *alphabet*, nor do they preserve any monuments of their history except for some obscure and vague reminiscences depicted in certain paintings, nor do they have written laws, but barbarous institutions and customs. In regard to their virtues, how much restraint or gentleness are you to expect of men who are devoted to all kinds of intemperate acts and abominable lewdness, including the eating of human flesh?…Such are, in short, the character and

> customs of these barbarous, uncultivated, and inhumane little men (322, *my emphasis*).

For Sepúlveda, the cannibalism of the indigenous peoples and their lack of an alphabet, in particular, provided evidence of their barbaric and uncivilized nature. And, just as Aristotle held that slavery benefited the slaves, Sepúlveda also suggested that Spanish authority and dominance would teach these barbarians to live in a more civilized manner (Hanke 1959). Moreover, according to Sepúlveda, this conversion to civilization and Christianity could occur only through "threats that inspire terror," and thus through violence and death (Hanke 1959, 68). For Sepúlveda, therefore, salvation and death were intimately intertwined: the possible salvation of the indigenous peoples of the Americas from their enslavement to their base, appetitive instincts was possible only through colonization and war (Brunstetter 2012).

If Las Casas's conception of the human did not question the unity of humanity in that it was premised on the capacity for the indigenous peoples of the Americas to assimilate to Christianity, Sepúlveda's "redescription of the human" outside this theocentric conception made the non-West into the "physical referent" of the irrational other, evicting indigenous peoples from the definition of the "human" and thus denying them the privileges enjoyed by their rulers (Wynter 2003, 263, 266; Brunstetter 2012). Yet, despite this difference, both equated the "human" with European culture and both advocated, albeit in distinct ways, the annihilation of indigenous cultures. For Las Casas, it was the presence or absence, not of Western alphabetic literacy, but of indigenous peoples' capacity to become Christian that determined whether they could be considered

human. Sepúlveda's association of cannibalism with the lack of alphabetic literacy, on the other hand, created a hierarchal distinction between rational humans and irrational animal-like others, a distinction that he mapped onto the Chain of Being, with the Western man of reason at the apex and the "Indians" without "even an alphabet" at the bottom (Wynter 2003). While Sepúlveda suggested that the "Indians" could become more like the Spanish through colonial rule, they could never be equal to their rulers. Drawing upon the human-animal distinction that characterized much early Spanish thought, Sepúlveda argued that the Indians could never completely overcome their appetitive animal instincts (Alves 2011). Even if they could begin to participate in some "recognizable forms of human life," their capabilities would only be "mechanical much like those of bees and spiders" (Padgen in Alves 2011, 42). Through such analogies between Indians and animals, Sepúlveda turned the Amerindian to a "half-man creature whose world was the very reverse of the 'human' world of those who by their 'magnanimity, temperance, humanity and religion' were the Indians' natural masters" (Padgen in Alves 2011, 42).

The cannibal trope was therefore central to the construction not only of the animal-like nature of those "without letters," but also to the self-understanding of the Spaniards as civilized, morally superior, and fully human in relation to the Amerindian populations they colonized. This co-production of the civilized "man of letters" and the uncivilized oral "man" was often justified and naturalized through appeals to existing social hierarchies within Spain. Indeed, Sepúlveda (1991) depicted the indigenous

peoples as inhuman primarily by referring to hierarchal relations, not only between human and animal, but also between adults and children, and men and women:

> …you can well understand…that with perfect right the Spaniards rule over these barbarians of the New World and the adjacent islands, who in wisdom, intelligence, virtue, and humanitas are as inferior to the Spaniards as infants to adults, and women to men. There is as much difference between them as there is between cruel, wild peoples and the most merciful of peoples, between the most monstrous intemperate people and those who are temperate in their pleasures, that is to say, between apes and men (322).

It is not surprising that colonial narratives of cannibalism, such as Sepúlveda's, align those indigenous peoples whom they classified as illiterate and ape-like with Spanish children and women, and thus that they define colonial difference with reference to the relations of generational and gendered difference that characterized the imperial metropole. The spread of vernacular literacies was central not only to the rise of European projects of imperial expansion; it was a key marker of social divisions within the imperial metropoles as well (Ferguson 2003). Since these divisions were often used to legitimate the colonial encounter, and colonial relations were deployed to rationalize the hierarchies of metropolitan life, their operation and interaction in the metropole must be attended to if we are to fully understand how and why orality was distinguished from literacy in the colonial imagination.

As Ashcroft (2001) proposes in his study of the co-invention of childhood and empire, the idea of the child as ontogenetically different from the adult was institutionalized in European societies only with the spread of literacy. It was literacy, he suggests, that created a gap between child and adult that education and instruction promised to close. The image of the illiterate child became important to the discourse of empire because it provided a way to manage the "ambivalence of imperialism," which Aschroft (2001) identifies as the tension between the "practice of exploitation" and "the ideology of nurture central to the civilizing mission" (36, 3). Just as the child was potentially evil and thus was in need of adult correction so too was the childlike colonial subject construed as in need of guidance and remediation by the more adult races lest it remain prey to its base instincts. As Ashcroft (2001) puts it, "we can see in the gap between childhood and adulthood created by the emergence of literacy in post-medieval culture a precise corollary of the gap between the imperial centre and the illiterate, barbarous, childlike races of empire. The strategies of surveillance, correction, and instruction which lie at the heart of the child's education transfer effortlessly into the disciplinary enterprise of empire" (39). Literacy thus promised to at once define and erase the gap between the childlike and adult races.

In early modern Europe, forms of literacy were also differentially distributed across gender lines. While the spread of vernacular literacies led to the growth of female reading publics in Europe, the continued exclusion of European women from institutions of higher education, and their lack of training in Latin meant that they were most often

constructed as non-literate.[72] As a consequence, their mode of communication continued to be defined as primarily "oral," a designation that from the fourteenth century onwards was used to portray women as deficient in what the dominant culture deemed knowledge (Ferguson 2003).[73] In Spain, women were encouraged to learn to read texts in the vernacular solely for domestic and religious reasons, but were not trained as writers. As Anne J. Cruz and Rosilie Hernandez (2011) show in their study of female literacy in early modern Spain, Spanish women who fought to be writers – whether they supported the models of conventional femininity of the time that tied women exclusively to domestic roles or sought to challenge the patriarchal institutions of the church and state – were castigated as threats to the established gender order. Early seventeenth-century moralists, such Antonio de Espinosa, viewed literate women as not only prone to deceit, but also to immoral sexual behaviour, and thus advised fathers that:

> unless your daughter is illustrious or she is made to look poorly by not knowing how to read or write, do not teach her, as such knowledge places lower-class and common women at great risk, for they will either write to or receive letters from those whom they should not, as well as open their husband's letters and wrongly learn other writings and secrets toward

[72] Ferguson (2003) proposes that despite the spread of vernacular literacies in early modern England and France, social authorities (particularly the clerics) continued to define literacy as involving facility in Latin and thus to cast those without clerical literacy as "illiterates" (16).

[73] As Ferguson (2003) notes, citing Adam Fox, by the 14th century in England the form of women's oral knowledge often referred to as the "old wives' tale," which under the feudal order had been seen as a source of knowledge and wisdom, became equated with "tale-telling" more generally and was portrayed as "any story, tradition, or belief which was thought to be inconsequential or false" (23).

> which the weak and curious feminine sex leans (quoted in Cruz and Hernandez 2011, 2).

In controlling women's literacy such moralists thus sought to control existing hierarchical gender relations between father and daughter, husband and wife, and to thereby secure patriarchal power in Spain.

In other parts of Europe, women who took up the pen and challenged the existing gendering of literacy were often demonized as masculine. A case in point is the protagonist of the 1620 anonymous English pamphlet *Hic-Mulier*, the cover of which depicts one female having her hair cut short and another wearing a man's hat. Written at the same time as "the controversy over women" or *les querrelles des femmes* – which sought to discipline women who were seen as rebellious, insubordinate, or masculine (Federci 2004) – the pamphlet ridicules female subjects who were challenging traditional modes of feminine dress and wearing masculine attire. Seeking to maintain a rigid sex-gender binary, the tract protests that the *Hic-Mulier* – the "man-woman" or female cross-dresser (whose gender transgression violated the norms of proper feminine behaviour) – should be properly considered a "monstrous deformitie": "not halfe man, halfe woman; half fish, halfe flesh; halfe beast, halfe Monster: but…all Diuell [devil]" (quoted in Warburton 2006, 167).

As Rachel Warburton (2006) demonstrates in her assessment of the relation between transvestism and translation in the pamphlet, the pamphlet equates the monstrosity of the mannish woman with the "monstrosities in language" that political and clerical authorities believed were precipitated by the replacement of clerical or Latin

literacy with the vernacular, and thus by the "faulty grammar of women who masquerade as men" by taking up writing (166). The concern with female cross-dressing therefore reflected a concomitant worry that the displacement of clerical literacy and the rise of vernacular literacy would allow for linguistic signs to be used not to convey the Word of God, but to deceive, just as female cross-dressing constituted a betrayal of the truth of sexual and gender difference (Ferguson 2003; Warburton 2006). The breaking of the "rules of gender" was therefore linked to the breaking of the "rules of grammar" (Ferguson 2003, 23).

Furthermore, the pamphlet links the "monstrous woman" – who, because "neither man nor woman," was not deemed "fully human" – to the barbarous nature of those other outsiders of Europe (Warburton 2006, 167). As the author of the pamphlet writes of the *Hic-Mulier*: "If this bee not barbarous, make the rude *Scithian,* the *vntamed Moore*, the naked *Indian*, or the wilde *Irish*, Lords and Rulers of well gouerned Cities" (quoted in Warburton 2006, 167). The cross-dressing woman (of letters) and those racial/cultural others of Europe therefore occupied a similar position in the social and political imaginary of early modern Europe: they constituted threats to an emerging patriarchal-imperial capitalist social order, and as a consequence needed to be forcefully reminded of their status as the subservient protectorates of European educated men. It was these men alone who had the power to determine the presence or absence of literacy, and thus to assess whether one could be recognized as human and obtain access to the economic and political allotments associated therewith.

Hence, within early modern/early colonial narratives of literacy, ideas of colonial, species, generational, and gender difference intertwined to sediment the distinction between the literate and the oral, the civilized and the barbarous, the human and the infrahuman, and to ensure that these categories marked certain bodies as in need of control and domination. If the literacy/orality distinction worked to legitimate human-animal and parent-child hierarchies and to confine European women to narrow feminine gender roles, it served within colonial narratives, such as Sepúlveda's (1991), to posit the necessity for colonial rule. Infantilized and feminized, associated with orality, cannibalism, and bestiality, Sepúlveda construed the indigenous peoples of the Americas as incapable of self-government because they were primarily oral peoples. And, in so doing, he cast them as a menace whose orality threatened to undo colonial power and who thus must be controlled through violence.

However, to suggest that colonial hierarchies were naturalized through appeal to species, generational, and gender differences, and that unequal gender relations were rendered intelligible by reference to regimes of colonial difference, is not to suggest that within the colonial imaginary European women and colonized peoples were seen as the same or that they were similarly subordinated by colonial patriarchy. Indeed, while the construction of the cannibal and the *Hic-Mulier* occurred during the same period, they combined in the colonial context in ways that had particularly grievous implications for colonized peoples.

For instance, while the cannibal trope was frequently used to position colonized peoples as bestial and inhuman, when it intersected in the colonial imaginary with the

patriarchal discourse of female orality, narratives of cannibalism tended to represent colonized peoples' sexuality as especially cannibalistic, voracious, and unrestrained, threatening to engulf, dismember, emasculate, and devour the men of empire (McClintock 1995). As Maria Lugones (2007) points out, and as I discussed in Chapter One, colonialism did not involve the imposition of "pre-existing, pre-colonial European gender arrangements on the colonized" (186). Rather, it was both constitutive of and constituted by a "colonial/modern gender system" that posited different genders – different masculinities and femininities – for colonized peoples than for their white colonizers (187).[74] Lugones argues that this mutual imbrication of white supremacy and heteropatriarchy historically allowed white hegemonic gender relations centered around the principles of sexual dimorphism, compulsory heterosexuality, and patriarchal power to be considered the norm – or, as Butler notes in her 1999 preface to *Gender Trouble*, to "establish what will and what will not be intelligibly human" (xxiii). At the same time, it produced subordinated forms of racialized genders that deviated from these normativities. As Lugones notes, many pre-colonial indigenous societies had complex and non-binaristic notions of gender, sexuality, and desire – including multiple genders and sexual practices – that defied the male-female, masculine-feminine, hetero-homosexual binaries at the heart of the Western modern sex/gender system. These societies thus were often

[74] In what can be seen as a postcolonial supplement to Butler's (1999) theory of how compulsory heterosexuality fortifies the normative sex/gender binary of "male" and "female, "masculine" and "feminine," and produces the internal stability of these terms, Lugones' theory of the "colonial/modern gender system" highlights the differential production of sex and gender along colonial and racial lines. It thus shows that the binary categories of "man" and "woman," and the gender imaginaries through which they are produced, are not universal. Rather, they are colonial constructs and are dependent upon "the classification of the population in terms of race" for their intelligibility (190).

seen by European colonizers as operating in violation of normative sex/gender presumptions that delimit what it is to be "human."

As a consequence, while Asian and Muslim women were typically portrayed within colonial discourse as hyperfeminine and subservient (see Chapter One), indigenous peoples of the Caribbean were often understood by their colonizers to be outside gender all together: they were seen "as animals in the deep sense of 'without gender.'" Since colonized females of the Caribbean were "sexually marked as female, but without the characteristics of [passive] femininity" that were taken as the norm, they were typically positioned within the colonial imaginary as sexually-aggressive and strong (Lugones 2007, 202-203). As McClintock (1995) writes, within the "pornotropic tradition" of colonial travel narratives, the colonies figured "as libidinously eroticised" and colonized "women figured as the epitome of sexual aberration and excess. Folklore saw them, even more than the men, as given to a lascivious venery so promiscuous as to border on the bestial" (22).

The association of cannibalism with patriarchal notions of colonized women's sexual appetites therefore served as a site of white male anxiety and fear of boundary loss (McClintock 1995). Indeed, as Jeff Berglund (1999) suggests, in the trope of the cannibal we find imperialism's "worst fear" – of white men "incorporated by an alien race" – "hyperbolically reconfigured in the most extreme form of incorporation: cannibalism" (56). Hence, while the cannibal was largely used in colonial narratives, such as Sepúlveda's treatise on natural slavery, to enforce the boundaries between the civilized and the barbarous, its association with orality and thus with incorporation meant that it

also served as "a symbol of the permeability, or instability, of such boundaries" and of the necessity to shore up such boundaries through violence (Guest 2001, 2; Kilgour 1990). On the one hand, it was partly through this discourse of violation, incorporation, and potential miscegenation that the imperial project could be constituted as civilized in relation to the bestial excess of the cannibals (McClintock 1995). On the other hand, this imagined innocence of the imperial project offered what Hulme (1998) rightfully calls a "screen for colonial violence" (9). While the imperialists enacted the savagery and violence they attributed to the colonized, their ascription of cannibalism and bestiality to the cultures of the colonized served to obfuscate imperial violence and aggression against the lands and bodies of indigenous peoples.

The cannibal trope therefore can be read as an example of what Butler (1993) calls, in another context, the "inverted projection of white paranoia" (19), which involves the simultaneous projection of white aggression and hate onto an external object and the regarding of that aggression and hate as an external threat that needs to be met with violence. In this "reversal of dangerous intention," the body that receives the violence is always already imputed the intention to injure, and this intention constitutes the recipient as simultaneously the aggressor, the instrument, and the origin of danger (21). We can see this circuit at work in the colonial construction of the cannibal. The figure of the cannibal rationalized the cannibalistic violence of imperialism by projecting the Western imperial appetite for the labour, resources, and lands of the colonies onto the colonized (Hulme 1998; Kilgour 2001). Indeed, as Lestringant (1997) notes, by attributing the cannibal label to colonized peoples, the early imperialists were able to justify their

annihilation. The cannibal trope thus was a "calumny" used to exclude from the realm of the human those so labelled (Hulme 1998, 5). It justified imperial aggression by allowing for the enslavement and genocide involved in colonial conquest to be presented as a civilizing crusade against the barbarians, who threatened to destroy the colonizer and who thus could be controlled only through European rule.

III. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House"[75]: Slavery, Literacy, and the Limits of Humanity

Let me now turn to another period in which literacy became a marker of the limits of humanity and a sign, not only of cultural difference, but also of explicit racial difference: the U.S. antebellum. A remarkable deployment of literacy as "an index for weighing human identities and differences" in a context that resonates with the present-day is evident in the institution of racialized and capitalist slavery in the U.S. south (Wiegman 1995, 63). Under slavery, the absence of Western alphabetic literacy amongst black slaves served in the imagination of the slave-holding society as a sign of black inferiority and lack of rational capacity (Gates 1986). It therefore provided a rationale for the slave's exclusion from the rights and freedoms promised by the universalist ethos of American liberalism and from the public sphere of civic entitlement (Wiegman 1995). In contrast, the presence of literacy offered the slave the promise of manumission and entrance into humanity and citizenship on terms established by the white master (Gates 1967, 1987). Herein lies the paradox at the heart of the deployment of literacy under conditions of colonial, racial, and/or imperial domination, a paradox that continues into the present. In

[75] This is the title of a chapter in Audre Lorde's 1984 book *Sister Outsider*.

the U.S. antebellum, literacy was used not only to affirm but also to challenge the existence of the gap between whites and blacks, between the human and the inhuman, which was the product of anti-Black racism. Yet, to the extent that the presence of black literacy was always established by criteria determined by the white master, the challenge of black literacy to notions of absolute racial difference – and its promise to liberate the black body and redeem black suffering – remained tethered to the circuit of subjection that characterized slavery and white heteropatriarchal domination (Gates 1987, 1987; Wiegman 1995). I now turn to this paradox, and to the ambivalences and ambiguities of literacy as a form of both domination and freedom for the slave.

In two pivotal essays that outline the intersection of slavery and literacy in early American thought and politics – "Literary Theory and the Black Tradition" and "Writing, Race, and the Difference it Makes" – Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1986, 1987) traces the centrality of literacy to the early American debate over slavery and the possibility of a common humanity between master and slave. For advocates of the U.S. slave system, the lack of literacy and formal literature amongst African Americans was evidence of their inhumanity, and thus of their status as chattel. For this reason, they supported statutes prohibiting the education of slaves and punishing those who taught slaves to read and write. Abolitionists, in contrast, pointed to written slave narratives to suggest the African-American's capacity for intelligence, reason, and civilization. For the abolitionists, black literacy served as a sign of the common humanity between the African American and the European, and therefore of the necessity for both the abolition of slavery and the extension of universal rights and political entitlements to the enslaved. Despite these

different positions on the possibility of black literacy, what advocates and opponents of racial slavery had in common, Gates (1987) suggests, was their alignment of freedom with literacy: for both, it was the ability to read and write that alone could enable the "metamorphosis" of the African-American slave from chattel into "man" (21, 123; Hartmann 1997).

These debates over the whether the slave could be rightly designated with the appellation human reveals that, within U.S. slave-holding society, literacy was seen not simply as a problem of reading and writing. It was also and, for my purpose here, more importantly a problem of how to distinguish the European from the African, the human from the non-human, the freeman from the slave, and thus of how to determine who was entitled to, and who excluded from, access to the rights and obligations attending civic inclusion (Wiegman 1995). That literacy could serve as a terrain upon which debates over the meaning of the human were waged is largely a consequence, Gates (1986) suggests, of the privilege granted to literacy as the "visible sign of reason" by Enlightenment philosophy (8). Tracing how the "negro's" relationship to literacy figures in the works of Hume, Kant, and Hegel, Gates demonstrates that writing served as one of the measures of the African's "capacity for progress," reason, and intelligence within these works (9). Given that Enlightenment philosophy viewed rationality as the precondition for political participation, the absence of formal writings amongst peoples of African descent, Gates suggests, was enough to cast them outside the realm of civilization and political authority, and to justify their enslavement.

Enlightenment philosophy was not alone in its allegation that African cultures lacked rationality and intelligence. Such truth-claims were also bolstered by an emerging racial science that sought to ground the link between racial difference and the possibility for civilization in nature and biology. Robyn Wiegman's (1995) study of the mutual imbrication of race and gender in the antebellum and postbellum U.S. traces the legacies of race-thinking in the natural and biological sciences, demonstrating the role that such sciences played in expelling African-Americans from a common humanity with Anglo-Americans. While natural history sought to answer the question of how many species of "man" there were through modes of classification based on physical and phenotypical differences, comparative anatomy found the truth of supposed permanent racial difference not only in "visible economy" of the skin, but deep within the "interior structure" of the human body: in the brain, skull, and sexual organs (24, 31). The sciences of comparative anatomy – such as phrenology and craniology – identified these biological structures as the loci of black inferiority and low intelligence.

According to Wiegman (1995), comparative anatomy's attempt to measure, classify, and order human difference justified the slave system by establishing the inferiority of African-Americans, their separate origins from white Europeans, and thus their rightful exclusion from formal equality though modes of comparison and analogies that moved in two seemingly opposing directions at once. On the one hand, comparative anatomy turned to the brain, skull, and genitals to demonstrate African Americans' *difference* from whites. For instance, by the 1840s, comparative anatomy had identified the size and shape of the skull and the parts and weight of the brain as "measures of

intelligence" (32); it sought to secure racial difference by claiming that the skulls of "lower races" were smaller and their brains lighter than those of Caucasians, and thus that they were less intelligent (33). On the other hand, these same sciences were obsessively concerned with the *similarities* between African-Americans and white women. At the same time as comparative anatomy constructed racial difference as a "fact" of biology, it also frequently worked to secure this difference by making analogies between the skull formation of the "lower races" and what it identified as the "infantile skulls" of white women (53). As Wiegman (1995) notes, the comparisons and analogies between "blacks and women" produced by comparative anatomy defended against feminists' claims for white women's enfranchisement by defining (white) women as the "lower race" of gender and thus as more akin to slaves than to white men (32). At the same time, it justified the exclusion of black slaves, in particular of black men, from the realm of public entitlements; by virtue of their bodily similarity to white women, black men could be excluded from the category of the masculine and thus prevented from achieving equal status with white men.[76]

[76] Indeed, since it was not only whiteness but also masculinity that defined the political legitimacy of the nineteenth-century citizen, comparative anatomy's exclusion of the black male slave from the definition of the masculine under white patriarchal gender relations solidified his removal from the terrain of formal citizenship rights and allayed the "threatening potential for human sameness" and common humanity embodied in the black man's ostensible maleness (Wiegman 1995, 48). As Wiegman (1995) notes, masculine sameness between lord and bondsman had to be disavowed if the racial hierarchy at the heart of relations of chattel slavery was to be maintained. My point here is not that gender difference was the only or the most definitive way of organizing racial hierarchies within the nineteenth-century U.S., but rather that comparative anatomy frequently appealed to notions of gender difference to exclude male slaves from the same entitlements granted to white men and thus that gender must be addressed if we are to understand how racism operated in the U.S. antebellum.

That comparative anatomy frequently resorted to analogies between black people and white women to justify the social subordination and exclusion of both groups from the category of citizenship does not therefore mean that such analogies were not contradictory or that the actual social situation of black slaves and white women was analogous. As Wiegman (1995) notes, while white women were denied formal citizenship rights and relegated to the private sphere of the household and reproduction, they were not considered chattel or inhuman, as were slaves. It is this difference between the "dependent citizenship" of white women and "anticitizenship" of slaves in the antebellum South that is hidden in comparative anatomy's similar assessment of the bodies of "blacks" and "women" (Olson quoted in Balfour 2005, 128).[77] Moreover, such analogies resulted in the exclusion of black women from both categories. As Wiegman (1995) asserts, racial sciences took the black man as the representative of "blacks," while white women were privileged within the category of "woman."[78] The production of the categories of "blacks and women" as simultaneously similar and mutually exclusive had significant implications for black women. White women were offered racial privileges and protection by white men in exchange for their adherence to the principles of white supremacy and the patriarchal organization of the family that were at the heart of nineteenth-century American society. Slave women, in contrast, were produced within

[77] Moreover, at the same time as comparative science was turning to analogies between black and white female bodies to deny black enfranchisement, the nineteenth-century cult of white womanhood praised white women for their domestic roles and their reproduction of the white race (Wiegman 1995). Hence, while white women were not considered full citizens, they were privileges within a regime of white supremacy that granted a special place to domesticity and white motherhood (Carby 1987).

[78] For a discussion of the continued polarization of blacks and women into two seemingly separate camps, and thus of the erasure of black women from both categories and of their position at the intersection of gender and race hierarchies, see Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989, 1991).

white slave society as property of their masters, cast outside the normative white definition of femininity, identified by comparative anatomy as hyper-developed (both physically and sexually), and thus compelled to labour in the same way as slave men while also experiencing sexual violence by their masters.[79] At the same time, the exclusion of black women from the categories of "woman" and "black" meant that, while U.S. suffrage movements would, by the end of the nineteenth century, focus exclusively on gaining the franchise for white women, slave resistance movements in the nineteenth-century U.S. would focus primarily on the entry of black males into formal citizenship and thus on the power differentials between white and black men, a point to which I shall return later in this section (Wiegman 1995).

While Enlightenment philosophy appealed to the written word to evict the African from the category of the human, and comparative anatomy used the gendering of racial difference to justify chattel slavery, this denial of the slave's (both male and female) humanity was ultimately imbricated in and secured through the violence endemic to the institution of racialized slavery. According to Gordon (2007), the violence and brutality of slavery were needed not only to suppress the humanity of the slave and to keep the

[79] There is some debate within the literature on slave women over whether their constitution as a commodity removed them from sphere of gender relations, which grants different roles to male and female bodies. Wiegman (1995) draws from Hortense Spillers' discussion of the "ungendering" of slave women to suggest that because slave women were denied the ability to fulfill the reproductive function of mother and wife, and were forced to labour on the plantations in the same way as black men, they existed outside the gendered universe. In contrast, Saidiya Hartman (1997) suggests that slave women were not "ungendered." Rather, they were assigned a different feminine gender than that assigned to white women within the white patriarchal plantation society. Hartman suggests that when we see gender only as a way of describing white women's relation to white men, we maintain the "white normativity of the category woman." She advocates that we instead look at its "divergent production" under slavery, and thus that we examine the discrepancy between the logic of protection that marked white womanhood and the forced sexual access to black women that was institutionalized in slavery (136).

slave subservient to the master. Violence itself constituted both the slave and the master; it simultaneously affirmed the absolute damnation of the slave and the absolute redemption of the master. Yet, despite the brutal and excessive violence characteristic of U.S. slavery, the infrahuman status of the slave was produced not only by the threat of actual death, but also by the slave's life sentence to "social death" (Patterson 1982, 5).

As Orlando Patterson (1982) points out in *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, the uniqueness of the institution of enslavement, and its mundane and quotidian forms of subjection (such as the denial of literacy and education to the slave), lies in the means whereby it fosters a form of "social death" for the slave. According to Patterson, this social death is a consequence of two simultaneous features of the slave condition. First, slavery is characterized by "natal alienation": slaves are alienated from all claims of birth, robbed of their lineage, denied marriage and the rights of paternity and maternity, deprived of the ability to pass on natal claims to their children, and blocked from forms of collective memory and their past (Patterson 1982, 6). Writing specifically about the institution of anti-black racism and U.S. slavery, Abdul R. JanMohamed (2005) describes this natal alienation as a process of "unbinding" slaves' attachments to their own "objects and values" and "rebinding" them to their status as slaves within plantation society (25). It is through this simultaneous process of unbinding and rebinding that the slave "cease[s] to belong in his own right to any legitimate social order" and instead becomes "a socially dead person" or a non-person (Patterson 1982, 5). Second, as a consequence of this natal alienation and the slave's constitution as a socially-dead person, the slave ceases to have a socio-political existence apart from that

of the master. The master alone is the "mediator" between the slave and any form of human community as well as between the slave and him or herself (8). In other words, since the slave is bereft of any ties to his or her own community and is instead an object under the master's control, the slave's entire life is dependent upon the master. This control marks the slave as a "social non-person," as object (Patterson 1982, 5).

The subject-position of the slave is therefore politically and existentially aporetic (JanMohamed 2005). To exist the slave must accept the master's power and thus his or her fate as a socially-dead person; to be a subject the slave must bind him or herself to this object status. JanMohamed (2005) designates this "aporetic subject-position" as the "death-bound-subject" (19, 2). On the one hand, the absolute power of the master over the slave means that the master is authorized to decide who may live and who must die. The slave therefore lives under what JanMohamed (2005) calls a "conditionally commuted death sentence" and consequently must live to avoid the "ubiquitous threat of death" (19, 2). On the other hand, the slave's desire to escape death compels him or her to "agree" to become a slave and "to acquiesce in every way to his master" (17, 16). Put differently, the slave's reliance upon the master for his or her own life requires that the slave deny his/ her own desire for a "full life" and agree to his/her subservience and obedience to the master to avoid death (19). The escape from death thus comes at high price: slaves must pay for their life by offering that life to their masters and attaching themselves to their social death. JanMohamed therefore suggests that the paradox of the "death-bound-subject" is that it must "avoid the possibilities of life as well as the possibility of death" (19). The oppression of slavery therefore lies not only in the

brutality of the physical violence meted out on slaves, but also in how this fear of violence requires slaves to avoid both life and death and thus to participate in their objectification and powerlessness by "consenting" to social death (20).[80]

According to Patterson (1982), while these mechanisms of subjection ensured the subservience of slave to the master, and to his/her own subjection, they could never completely quell the slave's desire for freedom and dignity. Given that during the U.S. antebellum the exclusion of slaves from the category of the human was legitimated through appeals to the slave's illiteracy and lack of letters, it is not surprising that the written word became one of the primary battlegrounds upon which African-American slaves waged their struggle for freedom. As Gates (1987) notes, the primacy granted to the written word as an emblem of humanity within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American debates on slavery is largely responsible for the "sense of urgency" that attends the African-American literary tradition: the slave's freedom depended upon his or her ability to read and write (3). Since literacy was deployed to separate "animal from human being, slave from citizen, object from subject" within the American imagination, the slave's appropriation of literacy challenged the very existence of the gap between whites and blacks, between the human and the inhuman, that had excised slaves from a common humanity with their masters (25). Black literacy was therefore born, in part, of the efforts by slaves to challenge ideas of black inferiority and to redeem black suffering by demonstrating the African-American's "potential for culture" (Gates 1987, 4; Wiegman 1995). Moreover, literacy held out the promise of manumission for slaves. As Gates

[80] The absolute power of the master and the submission of the slave, however, raises the question of what it means to consent to one's social death when the only other option is actual death.

(1986, 1987) notes, slave-owners often sold slave narratives and poems under the premise that the proceeds of such sales would be used as a bond to purchase the slave's freedom. For the slave, writing was therefore not solely "an activity of the mind" or a form of aesthetic achievement. It was also a "commodity" with which the slave could purchase manumission and the right to be considered human (Gates 1986, 9).

However, to learn to read and write was "a political act" for the slave that went beyond the struggle for individual manumission (Gates 1987, 4). As Theresa Perry (2003) shows in her study of slave narratives, poetry, and newspapers, literacy was constantly referred to in early African American writings not merely as path to freedom for individual slaves, but more importantly as a "communal act" of freedom:

> While learning to read was an individual achievement, it was a fundamentally communal act. For the slaves, literacy affirmed not only their individual freedom but also the freedom of their people. Becoming literate obliged one to teach others. Learning and teaching were two sides of the same coin, part of the same moment. Literacy was not something you kept for yourself; it was to be passed on to others, to the community. Literacy was something to share (14).

In the secret schools established by literate slaves for other slaves, literacy was transformed from a simple technique of reading and writing to a medium of protest against the system racial injustice that organized slaves' lives exclusively around the demands of the master. Hence, despite the slave owner's attempt to break all forms of

community amongst slaves, literacy served as one significant avenue for the formation of new slave communities of support and self-determination in the U.S. antebellum.

I do not wish to ignore the multifaceted ways in which African-American slaves deployed literacy as instrument of liberation and protest against the position of social death to which they were assigned. In Chapter Four, I will return to how oppressed peoples have appropriated literacy from its colonial and racial legacies and, in so doing, have transformed it into a liberatory practice. However, I want to focus here on how the slave-master's requirement that the slave demonstrate the ability to read and write in order to win manumission and gain entrance to the sphere of personhood served as much to tether and oppress the slave as to liberate. Slaves lived with what Gates (1987) calls the "burden of literacy": the burden to demonstrate that they too were human beings, whose difference from the animal was evinced in their ability to read and write according to criteria set by the master (4, 14). In other words, to undo their bondage and secure their freedom, slaves had to write against their political status as socially-dead. This required slaves to relinquish their own idiom and culture, and instead bind themselves to what white American culture deemed literacy. Moreover, within the social and political imagination of the white American slave-holding society, freedom remained a gift granted to slaves by their masters (Patterson 1982; Gates 1987). Just as the Spaniards arrogated for themselves the epistemic and political authority to determine the presence or absence of literacy among the indigenous groups they colonized, during the U.S. antebellum only the white master had the power to determine what would count as black literacy, when it occurred, and thus the possibility for the slave to be granted entrance

into the category of the human.[81] For instance, the African American writers George Moses Horton and Phyllis Wheatley, both former slaves, required the affirmation of reputable white publishers that their writings were authentic and the product of slaves (Gates 1987). Black textuality could usher the slave "away from the cotton field and toward freedom" only if confirmed by whites (Gates 1987, 4).

The white demand for black literacy was therefore a demand that slaves learn to speak in the language and idiom of the master and to thereby gain entry into the definition of the human on the basis of criteria established by white readers, criteria that determined in advance whether the black text would be read as a form of literacy (Gates 1987; Morrison 1992). The slave's struggle for manumission through the deployment of the written word therefore remained bound to the circuit of social death. If prior to emancipation, slaves depended upon the master for their existence and internalized the master's command to escape death, in the requirement that they deploy literacy as evidence of black humanity, slaves and ex-slaves had to also bind themselves to the master's concerns and make the master's command their own. The slave's freedom through literacy therefore remained tethered to and dependent upon the very norms that produced unfreedom.[82] This problem is not unique to the American slave context. As Gordon (2007) notes, people denied their humanity have often oriented their liberation struggles around assertions of their humanity and have attempted to prove to their

[81] As Patterson (1982) observes, the U.S. had one of the lowest manumission rates of all slave systems, and the masters and mistresses who allowed their slaves to buy freedom "understood that freedom as the greatest gift they could give their slave and they consciously used it as a means to control and [cultivate] divisions among blacks" (217).
[82] See Hartman (1997) for a discussion of this tension in African American struggles for freedom.

masters that "We are as human as you are"; however, such claims could often only be "done at the price of a standard that affirms their subhumanity" and that upholds the capacity of the dominant groups (the "you") to define the human (4). By seizing upon that which had been used against them – literacy – black writers similarly remained circumscribed by the same criteria that had previously justified their expulsion from humanity.

Literacy for the slave was therefore a double-edged phenomenon: it promised freedom while binding the slave even tighter to the master's tools (Gates 1987). This is evident not only in the fact that black writing required white recognition to be considered literacy, but also in the attachment to sexual difference and patriarchal gender that marked the slave's entrance into humanity and was a definitive feature of the slave's struggle for literacy. As Wiegman (1995) suggests, what Gates calls the "burden of literacy" was itself gendered. Since the institution of slavery involved the feminization of the black male, early "African American writings were overwhelmingly concerned with the slave as a gendered being, finding in the possibilities of sexual difference a rhetorical strategy for marking the African(-American)'s equal humanity" (44). The black male slave therefore not only lived under the injunction to write himself into humanity. Enfranchisement for the black male could be accomplished only by assuming the power of the masculine and thus through his commitment to "the continual fragmentation of citizenship according to a deeply exclusive masculine universalism" (Wiegman 1995, 68). Hence, while legal discourses of enslavement ensured the disenfranchisement of both male and female slaves, slave men's struggle for liberation relied upon the rhetoric

of sexual difference and desire for normative gender relations that necessitated the exclusion of female bodies from the public sphere. Slave women thus remained excluded from equal entry into citizenship (Wiegman 1995).

While literacy promised liberation for the slave, the paradox of the abolitionist's promotion of literacy as freedom is that anti-black racism continued despite the existence of black writing (Gates 1987). As Gates (1987) notes, while African-American writings were constituted in response to the denial of a common humanity between slave and master, they served in the white imagination not as an emblem of sameness but rather as further evidence of black difference. In the postbellum period, black writing – alongside the racist practices of lynching and legalized segregation within institutions such as schools and universities – was deployed to keep blacks separate from whites, to enforce the continued political disfranchisement of former slaves, and to reinforce the racialized notion of literacy as "White property" to be controlled and disseminated exclusively by white Americans (Prendergast 2003, 7).[83] In the end, the abolitionist promise of human sameness through literacy turned into its opposite: an affirmation of racial difference (Gates 1986, 1987). Literacy is therefore part of the history of "elusive emancipation and travestied freedom" that characterizes African-American liberation struggles, providing evidence of how the legacies of slavery continued to operate in the postbellum period (Hartman 1997, 11).

[83] See Prendergast (2003) for a discussion of how literacy remained a site of social conflict after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which ostensibly desegregated the U.S. school system. In response to the perceived threat that *Brown* posed to white property interests and privilege, literacy became increasingly claimed by white Americans as exclusively "White Property" in the post-*Brown* era (7).

IV. The Institutionalization of the Literacy/Orality Divide in Sociolinguistics and Anthropology

Thus far I have traced how the distinction between literacy and orality operated within colonial and racial discourses from the late fifteenth to the nineteenth century to demarcate the difference between human and infrahuman, civilized and uncivilized, master and slave. I now turn to the mechanisms – both political and epistemic – through which this distinction was institutionalized and accorded scientific validation in the academic disciplines of sociolinguistics and anthropology during the post-WWII period. As Ferguson (2003) notes, literacy studies first emerged as an organized field of scholarly inquiry at this time. The field is therefore marked by both the beginning of the Cold War and the growing orthodoxy of modernization theories within the North American and Western European academy (Graff 1979). This orthodoxy advanced the idea that formerly colonized nation-states, which were coming to be known collectively as the "Third World," should be viewed as "the world of tradition and irrationality, underdeveloped and overpopulated, disordered and chaotic" (Goldberg 1993, 164). For modernization theorists, such societies could modernize and reach the "take-off" period required for economic growth only by following the stages of capitalist development already accomplished by the "First World," which was held up as the norm to which societies of the Third World must aspire (Rostow 1990). The political and economic maturity of the Third World could be hastened with Western development assistance and intervention (Shohat 2002).

As Ella Shohat (2002) notes, modernization theory was therefore characterized by a contradictory logic. On the one hand, it pivoted on a binarist divide between tradition and modernity, and sought to map the distance between traditional from modern societies on a "diachronic line of progress," just as earlier theories of a Chain of Being had produced a hierarchy of races and civilizations (Mudimbe 1988, 15). On the other hand, the modernization paradigm outlined strategies to transform traditional societies into modern ones, to allow the Third World to "catch-up" to the First World. It thus resembled earlier prescriptions for civilizing the "uncivilized." As I indicated in the previous section, the racist dynamics of a white slave-holding society had compelled black slaves to mimic their masters to secure their manumission. The game of "catch-up" advanced by modernization theory projected this paternalistic and "infantilizing trope on a global scale": it permitted societies of the Third World no other option than, as Shohat (2002) proposes, to repeat and imitate "on another register the history of the 'advanced' world" (74).

Modernization theory therefore provided a new salvation narrative for the post-WWII period: it offered an image of the West as the apex of human development, which other societies could emulate only if they followed the plan of modernization laid out by Western development practitioners. Western alphabetic literacy was crucial to this project of bringing modernity to those societies deemed traditional, not only in their culture, but also in their productive activities. Indeed, throughout the 1960s, U.N.E.S.C.O. recommended to newly developing countries that adults be made at least partially literate as a "first and indispensible step toward modernization," which required eliminating the

"irrational" attitudes and pre-scientific mentality allegedly associated with orality (Mazama 1998, 7). Such projects therefore aligned literacy with modernity and progress, and orality with tradition and economic stagnation.

With literacy promoted as a solution to the "backwardness" of Third World societies and a gateway to modernity, literacy studies came to dominate the academic disciplines of sociolinguistics and cultural anthropology (Street 1995). As Goldberg (1993) observes, while Western governments may have been forced to withdraw from their colonies in the period after formal independence, Western academics did not always face the same fate. Moreover, in the post-independence era, academics produced the expert knowledge according to which the Third World was to be restructured by the emerging field of international development.[84] While political scientists and economists emphasized the reform of governance structures and the introduction of capitalist-based market economies as the pre-conditions for economic "take-off," sociolinguists and anthropologists produced a body of knowledge that takes as its object of inquiry the distinction between (modern) literate and (traditional) oral cultures, as its method the mode of classifying and comparing the two, and as its rationale the possibilities for transforming oral cultures into literate ones.[85]

The "Great Divide" between literacy and orality is an organizing motif in many areas of communication studies across the humanities and social sciences. The continuing popularity of this "Great Divide" thesis, however, is largely a consequence of Walter Ong's (1982) widely-cited study, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*

[84] See also Smith (1999).
[85] My analysis of this classificatory system is influenced by Mudimbe (1988)

(Biakolo 1999). In what follows, I therefore focus primarily on this work, tracing the connections between it and earlier works in anthropology on the "Great Divide" between literacy and orality. As is by now widely acknowledged, *Orality and Literacy* advances a technological deterministic theory of literacy and orality, which takes these media or modes of communication to be *the* defining characteristics of modern and traditional societies respectively, and as determinative of both their modes of social and political organization and the cognitive processes of their members. According to Ong, the advent of alphabetic writing initiated an unprecedented change in human cultural development. It brought about rationality, which Ong suggests is absent from oral cultures, and led to a fundamental restructuring of human consciousness and societies. Drawing from Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato* (1963) and *Origins of Western Literacy* (1976), which suggest that the creation of the phonological alphabet in ancient Greece transformed Greek society and thought (Mazama 1998), Ong proposes that only literacy allows for abstract and logical thinking, introspective reflection, and the distance between knower and known that is the condition of objectivity, which he defines as "personal disengagement or distancing" (45; see also Biakolo 1999). While Ong acknowledges that all thought is analytic in that it "breaks its material down into its various components," he argues that writing restructures thought by allowing for "abstractly sequential, classificatory, explanatory examination of phenomena or of stated truths" (8). With the introduction of alphabetic writing, Ong claims, human speech became fixed and controlled (as Nebrija had previously argued), thus permitting critique and reflection (Street 1995). Moreover, since the written word allowed for the visual representation and

thus control of speech, and for one to distance oneself from what one reads or writes, it also led to the formation of scientific thought and rationality, according to Ong (see also Street 1995; Mazama 1998).

Within Ong's classificatory framework, orality is presented as diametrically opposed to literacy. Ong suggests that oral cultures lack logic, introspective and scientific thought, and objectivity – qualities that he associates solely with literacy. As a consequence, their cognitive development lags behind that of their literate counterparts (Mazama 1998). Ong acknowledges both that "today primary oral culture in the strict sense hardly exists, since every culture knows of writing and has some experience of its effects" (11) and that "a literate person cannot fully recover a sense of what the world is to a purely oral people" (12). Yet, he nevertheless attempts to unearth the features of what he calls "primary orality" – or "the orality of cultures untouched by literacy" (6) – and to outline the impact of oral communication on the consciousness and social structures of people living in these cultures. Within these cultures, Ong suggests, knowledge is stored and transmitted only through storytelling, and thus through the repetition of pre-existing phrases, stock-characters, and patterns. Ong extrapolates from these mnemonic devices, and the formulaic style of oral storytelling, to conclude that knowledge production in these cultures is traditional and conservative. Since oral cultures always repeat the same formula and phrases, he suggests, they are not creative or innovative. Instead, these cultures inhibit experimentation and thus are unchanging. In addition, Ong contends that, because oral storytelling requires an audience, the personality structures of oral peoples are communal; in contrast, literate peoples are

individualistic because their writing and reading practices promote introspection and analysis.

According to Ong, oral thought is therefore aggregative – it joins together pre-existing phrases – and not analytical – it does not cast doubt on the truthfulness of such phrases. As Ama Mazama (1998) notes, Ong proposes that oral cultures trade only in myth, not philosophy or abstract thought, which for Ong emerges only with the introduction of alphabetic writing. Furthermore, Ong suggests that because oral cultures store and transmit knowledge primarily through storytelling, what gets recognized as knowledge in oral cultures is only what the individual storyteller decides is important to the context at hand, and not the impartial and objective facts produced by literate cultures. Without writing, oral cultures cannot record history, he argues, or confirm the accuracy of knowledge claims about the past against any written records (Mazama 1998). Hence, according to Ong, one of the most significant consequences of the introduction of literacy is that it enables the entry of oral peoples into history, law, and complex forms of social organization and administration (Street 1995; Mazama 1998; Biakolo 1999).

Ong claims that the term "oral" is more "positive" than the terms "illiterate," "savage," and "primitive" that circulate in older anthropologies and that associate orality exclusively with lack and deficiency (170). Yet, he nevertheless suggests that "[o]rality is not an ideal, and never was. To approach it positively is not to advocate it as a permanent state for any culture" (171). As Emevwo Biakolo (1999) suggests, by positioning orality not only as absolutely distinct from literacy, but also as inferior to it, Ong's literacy/orality classificatory schema reproduces the classical cultural oppositions

produced within the disciplines of cognitive and cultural anthropology. Indeed, Biakolo points out that there are many parallels between Ong's account of the literacy/orality divide and the earlier ethnocentric work of Levy-Bruhl (1910) and the later culturally relativist work of Levi-Strauss (1966), regardless of Ong's claims to the contrary. Both Levy-Bruhl and Levi-Strauss posit an absolute division between the culture of the native and the culture of the anthropologist. In *Primitive Mentality* (1923), Levi-Bruhl argues that the "primitive mentality" or the mentality of "primitive communities" is characterized by "distaste for logical thought" and "refrains from reasoning and reflecting," qualities that are celebrated in advanced societies (21). The "primitive mind" is therefore prelogical and concrete: it is guided by myth and the "direct perception of things" rather than by analytic thought that investigates "causal connections that are not self-evident" (21, 34). In addition, just as Ong posits memory as the centre of oral communication and as the cause of its conservative tendencies, Levi-Bruhl suggests that this role of memory and repetition in primitive societies results in the underdevelopment of reason and of creative faculties in their peoples (see also Mudimbe 1998).[86]

Levi-Srauss's (1966) *The Savage Mind* both builds upon this division between advanced and primitive societies and relativizes it by suggesting that they are characterized by two different but nonetheless "parallel modes of acquiring knowledge"

[86] In *Primitive Mentality*, Levi-Bruhl (1923) provides evidence of the "distaste" for reason in primitive peoples by quoting from the missionary W. H. Bentley:

> An African, whether negro or Bantu, does not think, reflect, or reason if he can help it. He has a wonderful memory, has great powers of observation and imitation, much freedom in speech, and very many good qualities; he can be kind, generous, affectionate, unselfish, devoted, faithful, brave, patient, and preserving; but the reasoning and inventive faculties remain dormant (29).

(13): science of the abstract and science of the concrete (Mudimbe 1988). Both types of science require "the same sort of mental operations," Levi-Strauss (1966) contends, and "differ only in the types of phenomena to which they are applied" (13). Hence, in contrast to Levi-Bruhl, he suggests that these two modes of scientific knowledge are "equally-valid" (13). Yet, as Biakolo (1999) suggests, Levi-Strauss's conception of the science of the concrete (mythical and magical thought) as a form of "intellectual bricolage" reveals the intellectual heritage that connects his anthropology to Levi-Bruhl's earlier ethnocentrism and to Ong's theory of orality as aggregative, conservative, repetitive, and antithetical to analysis. Levi-Strauss suggests that Neolithic man, who first practiced the "science of the concrete" the "arts of civilization (agriculture, animal husbandry, pottery, weaving, conservation, and the preparation of food)," is essentially a *bricoleur* whose intellectual activity consists in reorganizing pre-existing constructions or formulations. Mythical thought is thus constrained and limited by the possible number of combinations of previous constructions. Levi-Strauss contrasts the intellectual bicoleur's science of the concrete with the engineer's science of the abstract, which works with concepts not percepts, and which extends knowledge "by attempting to go beyond constraints" (19; Biakolo 1999).

While the typologies of primitive/advanced societies and science of the concrete/science of the abstract developed by Levi-Bruhl and Levi-Strauss hint at some of the parallels between Ong's orality/literacy divide and the classical anthropological division of cultures, this academic lineage is most apparent in the works of the anthropologist Jack Goody (Biakolo 1999). In *The Domestication of the Savage Mind,*

Goody (1977) offers a critique of Levi-Strauss's relativism, and advocates replacing previous anthropological classificatory schemes of primitive/advanced and magic/science with a focus on the "Great Divide" between orality and literacy (3). Goody suggests that these older anthropological categories are too broad to adequately account for the most significant distinction between cultures. For Goody, this distinction is best located in differences between oral and literate communication technologies. In "The Consequences of Literacy," Goody and Ian Watt (1968) outline the developments in human cognition (the introduction of abstract, independent thought and historical knowledge) and social organization (the introduction of democracy, bureaucracy, and hierarchal social stratification) supposedly brought about by the advent of literacy and its replacement of orality as the primary communication technology.[87] For Goody (1977), any account of cultural difference must therefore take as its departure point such impacts of writing on the human psyche and society.

The echoes of this early work in cognitive and cultural anthropology haunt and provide the framework for Ong's sociolinguistic account of literacy/orality. Ong repeats the anthropology of the literacy/orality divide and, like Goody, breaks with Levi-Strauss's relativism to produce a social evolutionary theory of literacy acquisition that treats orality and literacy not as synchronic but as diachronic stages (Mudimbe 1988; Dickinson 1994; Street 1995). According to Ong (1982), alphabetic literacy is the necessary precondition for full human development and progress:

[87] See Street (1995) and Grossman (2013) for a critique of Goody.

> Without writing, human consciousness cannot achieve its fuller potentials...In this sense, orality needs to produce and is destined to produce writing. Literacy…is absolutely necessary for the development not only of science but also of history, philosophy, explicative understanding of literature and of any art, and indeed for the explication of language (including oral speech) itself. There is hardly an oral culture or a predominantly oral culture left in the world today that is not somehow aware of the vast complex of powers forever inaccessible without literacy…We have to die to continue living (15).

Ong's appeal to the inherent superiority of literacy ignores the continuing reliance of even the most literate society upon oral modes of communication, a reliance that challenges the "Great Divide" between literacy and orality elaborated in sociolinguistics and anthropology (Street 1995; Biakolo 1999; Grossman 2004). At the same time, it ignores the continuity between the formal linguistic structures of oral and the written language. As scholars influenced by Derrida's (1997) account of language (including speech) as a form of writing or signification have demonstrated, indigenous "talk" should be approached as a form of text and therefore as a kind of writing (Godard 1986; Muecke 1992; Dickinson 1994). Yet, rather than approach indigenous oral cultures as writing cultures, Ong's theory of the distinction between orality and literacy instead locates "orality on a progressivist axis, as an early phase of sociocultural development that inevitably yields…to literacy" (Grossman 2004, 60). Ong therefore constructs primary oral cultures as reflecting forms of "pastness," and hence as revealing the prehistory and

genesis of human consciousness and social organization; in contrast, the advent of literate cultures holds out the promise of permitting the entrance of oral cultures into history and civilization (Grossman 2004, 61; Street 1995).

Sociolinguistic and anthropological accounts of the literacy/orality divide refer more to cultural difference than to race and therefore appear to distance themselves from earlier formulations that contrasted civilized with "savage" people. Nevertheless, such accounts of the literacy/orality divide repeat and recast the dichotomies advanced by earlier and later colonial anthropologies (Biakolo 1999). In both their conception and articulation of the literacy/orality divide, Ong and Goody harken back to and reinvent the long tradition within the West of reducing different cultures to their modes of communication and of placing these cultures on a hierarchy of humankind. Just as the Spanish colonizers dismissed Amerindian semiotic systems and record-keeping as outside the realm of the literate, and white slaveholders established the criteria in relation to which black textuality could be deemed writing, Ong and Goody also enshrine the Western definition of literacy as the only definition and constitute it as a normative category in relation to which other communicative practices are assessed and their difference from the Western norm established. As Mudimbe (1988) suggests, theories of the "Great Divide" between literacy and orality thus offer a classificatory structure that allows for the organization of the identities and differences of societies according to ideal types or taxonomical categories ("literacy" and "orality"). These categories are construed as universal in order to allow for the comparison of different cultures. Yet, as Street (1995, 2011) notes, while these categories are presented as universal and as thus allowing

for a seemingly neutral process of sorting out and comparing different societies according to their dominant communicative practices, the criteria on the basis of which this sorting occurs are grounded in Western histories of writing.[88]

The literacy/orality divide can therefore be best thought of as what Mudimbe (1988) calls an "ordering of otherness" (12): it involves the classification of other societies according to a "grid of Western thought and imagination" in which alterity is not merely a form of difference or distinctness, but is rather "a negative category of the same" (12). In other words, the characteristics that Ong and Goody assign to "oral" cultures – traditionalism, myth, and homeostasis – serve to define the modernity, rationality, and "creative dynamism" of "literate" cultures (Mudimbe 1988, 27). By denying the dynamism that exists in oral cultures, and positing a natural evolution between the oral and the literate, their works normalize the dichotomization of cultures and peoples produced within those colonial and racist scripts outlined in previous sections of this chapter. And, just like those older scripts, Ong and Goody also end up producing "marginal societies, cultures, and peoples" (Mudimbe 1988, 4).

V. Conclusion

What lessons might we draw from these histories? What does the coloniality of literacy tell us about present-day neo-imperial narratives of literacy as pathway out of traditional patriarchy and into modernity for Afghan women? These colonial histories reveal that the

[88] For instance, Ong (1982) argues that to expand the definition of literacy to include multiple signifying systems – including pictographic and logographic ones – is to "trivialize its meaning." For Ong, writing was invented not "when simple semiotic marking was devised but when a coded system of visible marks was invented whereby a writer could determine the exact words the reader would generate from the text" (45).

neo-imperial concern with the absence of literacy amongst Afghan women is a legacy of the logic of coloniality that emerged with the Spanish colonization of the Americas. This logic was organized not solely around colonial and racial difference but also species, gender, and generational differences, which intersected in the colonial context to define the limits of the human and to associate it solely with the white bourgeois definition of "Man." That literacy continues to be deployed as a marker of the inherent superiority of the West and of its moral obligation to bring civilization to "primitive" peoples is largely a consequence of these historic connections between literacy, colonialism, and racism – connections that were later institutionalized in the disciplinary knowledge production of sociolinguistics and anthropology.

Reading the history of literacy from its "dark side" – the side of coloniality – also serves as a reminder of the barbarism that underwrites modernity, and thereby teaches us to be wary of narratives of literacy and modernity as progress and salvation. The coloniality of literacy reveals that the Western definition of literacy, which is normally taken as a sign of European modernity, was actually formed in the colonial encounter, and thus is intertwined with the violence perpetrated by Europeans in their overseas colonies and the slave trade. Moreover, as the history of literacy's role in the colonization of the Americas, U.S. slavery, and the modernization project demonstrates, narratives of literacy as progress rely for their intelligibility upon the simultaneous production and foreclosure of an illiterate other, who is excluded from the realm of the human and who functions to shore up the image of the literate as modern, morally-superior, and civilized.

It is in this history of literacy as a sign of modernity and barbarism, freedom and domination, that we find the roots of neo-imperial narratives of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" victimized by "illiterate" and "dangerous Muslim men." These two figures can be best thought of as heirs to the Amerindian without letters, the bestial cannibal, the slave, and the "traditional man." What do these trope-ical figures accomplish for imperialism? As we have seen, the figures that haunt the colonial archive served to demarcate the distinction human and infrahuman and to thereby justify imperial and racialized violence. As Derek Gregory (2004) notes, the "casting out" (249) of certain people from the realm of humanity works to "mark other people as irredeemably other and…[to] license the unleashing of exemplary violence against them" (Goldberg 2004, 16). Moreover, as the history of cannibalism reveals, the expulsion of certain groups from humanity and from morality serves simultaneously to conceal imperial violence and to justify it by allowing for colonial violence, both old and new, to be re-cast as a crusade of the civilized against the savage (Hulme 1998). Violence can be used against those deemed inhuman in the name of saving them from their culture, and of bringing literacy and thus civilization to them (Razack 2008).

This tension between salvation and death, as Christine Delphy (2002) suggests, characterizes the "missionary's paradox" – "We will save their souls (their freedoms) even if we have to kill them to do it" (315). It is thus part and parcel of what Mbembe (2003) calls "necropolitics" or "the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (11). As Mbembe notes, there are different forms of racialization: "naturalism (based on an inferiority claim) and historicism (based on the claim of the historical

"immaturity" – and therefore "educatablity" – of the natives)" (22). These different forms of racialization, he suggests, correspond to different kinds of necropower: "the terror of actual death; or a more 'benevolent' form – the result of which is the destruction of a culture in order to 'save the people' from themselves" (22). While such forms of necropower seem distinct – one form is oriented toward the destruction of life while the other seeks to foster it in specific ways – they often worked in tandem in past, and continue to shape present-day practices of empire. As Chapter One demonstrated, the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" operates as a foil to the West, thereby serving not only to justify the Afghan war but also the betterment of Afghanistan through post-war reconstruction literacy projects. Just as the native, the cannibal, the slave, and the "traditional" man were often promised a way out of their "primitive" state through Western forms of literacy – the criteria for which were always determined by the West – the civilizing mission of the new imperialism also proffers literacy as a "certificate of humanity" to those excluded from the human by virtue of their illiteracy (Hountondji in Gates 1986, 11).

This promise of salvation through literacy is thus ultimately a false one.[89] The history of colonial knowledge production about literacy reveals that salvation is itself a form of violence. If imperialism is to be successful, it must deny the humanity, epistemic practices, and multiple literacies of the colonized. Indeed, while the new imperialism promises Afghan women salvation from the death-world of the new imperialism, it simultaneously excludes them from the authority to determine the meaning of literacy in

[89] See also Wiegman (1995) for a discussion of this false promise of freedom through literacy for (male) slaves.

their own lives. As this chapter has shown, to the extent that the authority to determine the presence or absence of literacy remains in the purview of the imperialists, literacy can never function as an instrument of liberation for those deemed "illiterate" but will serve only as a tool to demarcate "who may live and who must die" (Mbembe 2003, 11).

Feminists therefore must pay special attention to how colonial definitions of literacy continue to circulate in present-day imperial projects in ways that justify both the terror against and the salvation of the "illiterate Third World woman." Yet, we must also come to terms with own location in these histories of violence. In the next chapter, I tease out some of these complicities, and explore how the coloniality of literacy and its necropolitics of salvation have come to serve as the implicit frameworks through which contemporary international feminists understand their own relationship to the plight of the "illiterate Third World woman."

CHAPTER THREE

PEDAGOGIES OF EMPIRE: LITERACY AND THE POLITICS OF INTERNATIONAL LIBERAL FEMINISM

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, international feminist projects aimed at closing the gender gap in literacy and improving women's disadvantaged situation within poor countries of the global south have achieved unprecedented visibility on the global stage (Unterhalter 2005; McRobbie 2009; Blackmore 2009). This attention is due primarily to the success of the international feminist movement in putting gender equality onto the agendas of nation-states, donor agencies, and international financial institutions (Arnot 2009). Beginning with the U.N.'s adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1979 and the four U.N. world conferences on women between 1975 and 1995,[90] Western liberal feminists have built a "women's rights as human rights" movement aimed at achieving individual rights, equality, and autonomy for women worldwide (Bunch 1994). In the area of female literacy, liberal feminist internationalism has highlighted the staggeringly low rates of technical literacy skills amongst girls and women in developing countries, and pointed to them as evidence of gender-based discrimination in poor countries of the global south (see Dowd 1995; Barlow 2000). As a result of this activism, girls and women in poor

[90] These conferences occurred in Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995).

countries are now recognized as subjects worthy of educational opportunities and investment (McRobbie 2009).[91]

Yet, given the imbrication of literacy in colonial and neo-imperial projects, this new visibility of international feminist movements for literacy requires closer investigation. Rather than celebrate the success of international feminist activism, feminist historians of the present need to instead track feminism's own entanglements in the logic of coloniality outlined in the previous chapters: a logic that organizes communicative practices according to a literacy/orality classificatory structure. In the past, this logic of coloniality demarcated the civilized from the uncivilized, the human from the infrahuman, and the modern from the traditional. Today, it divides the figure of the post-feminist literate "Western woman" from the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" who is trapped in her traditional culture and requires rescue from the West.

This chapter traces how this logic of coloniality is reproduced within the project of liberal feminist internationalism in both its second-wave and third-wave feminist manifestations. Much scholarship treats contemporary liberal feminist internationalism as a uniform project, informed by the principal tenets of the second-wave of the feminist movement in North America, especially by its concern with female victimization and its goal of securing more rights and entitlements from nation-states and international organizations to redress women's subordinate status within patriarchal societies (Wilson 2006). Over the last decade, however, many international liberal feminists have distanced

[91] This is evidenced, for instance, by the U.N.'s Millennium Development Goals which sought to achieve gender parity in education and increase the literacy rate among the 500 million "illiterate" women in the global south by 2005 (a target that has been missed) (McRobbie 2007, 2009).

themselves from this "victim" motif. They have instead adopted the third-wave feminist rhetoric of empowerment, agency, and gender variance or non-binaristic gender identities. This rhetoric emerged in the 1990s, and was inspired by post-structuralist and queer interventions in feminism (such as Judith Butler's anti-essentialist theory of gender performativity) that critiqued the unified and homogeneous political identity of "woman" that served as the second-waves' epistemological and ontological foundation (Chambers and Carver 2008). It is also linked to the activism of young feminists who have challenged what Naomi Wolf (1993) calls the "victim feminism" of second-wave feminism and have instead celebrated individual resistance to patriarchy (147). Third-wave feminist rhetoric is embodied in the slogans of "Girl Power," "Girl Rule," and "Girls Kick Ass" that were first developed by the North American Riot Grrrl movement to reclaim "the fierce and aggressive potential of girls...and girl culture" and were later popularized by the global beauty and culture industry (Gonick 2006, 7; Banet-Weiser 2004). Today, this rhetoric is reflected in international campaigns for girls' and women's rights, such as the "I am Powerful" campaign of the humanitarian relief agency, C.A.R.E. The campaign's slogan "She has the power to change her world...You have the power to help her do it," for instance, explicitly appeals to third-wave feminist tropes of agency and empowerment rather than of victimization for its intelligibility (Sensoy and Marshall 2010).

Women, feminist, and gender studies scholarship and curriculum typically treat the second- and third-waves of feminism as distinct temporal and generational

movements, with irreconcilable and mutually exclusive political stances.[92] In what follows, I highlight the divergent political strategies and agendas that inform second- and third-wave international liberal feminisms, and demonstrate the extent to which each of these movements positions itself as a response to the perceived limitations of the other. But, I also suggest that the second- and third-waves of international liberal feminism have more in common than is often acknowledged within long-standing debates about the differences between the "waves" of the feminist movement. Tracing some of the overlooked continuities between these two approaches, I make the case that both – albeit in distinct and seemly contradictory ways – affirm the division between the empowered Western feminist subject and the victimized "illiterate Third World woman" at the heart of the new imperialism and thereby reproduce the vestiges of colonial knowledge production about literacy.

My analysis of international feminism is necessarily selective. It does not cover the vast range of scholarship and activism that falls under this title. I begin by critically examining the second-wave feminist rhetoric of victimization that undergirds the moral philosopher Martha Nussbaum's (2000, 2011) capabilities approach to international development. This approach aims to improve the lives of poor women in the global south whom Nussbaum (2000) suggests lack access to basic literacy skills and thus to the capabilities necessary for what she regards as "truly human functioning" and flourishing (6). While Nussbaum is not the only second-wave international feminist to focus on the plight of "illiterate" women, she has been selected because her capabilities approach to

[92] For example, see Antrobus (2004); Gillis, Howie, and Munford (2007); Dicker (2008); and Bromley (2012).

the measurement of quality of life is enormously influential and has been adopted by many N.G.O.s and international agencies, including the United Nations Development Program and the World Bank (Jaggar 2006). My argument is that Nussbaum's capabilities approach, which replicates second-wave Western feminism's attachment to injured identities and to the law as the protector against injury, installs the figure of mute and passive "illiterate Third World Woman" as the proper object of international feminism and the Western woman as its proper subject. In so doing, it reproduces the logic of difference that underwrites the civilizational discourse of the new imperialism: one that posits Western and non-Western women as mutually exclusive subject positions and populations, and that constructs the injured "illiterate Third World woman" as not-yet fully human and in need of salvation.

I then compare Nussbaum's capabilities approach to Deborah Ellis's (2000) *The Breadwinner*, a children's novel that has been widely used in the global citizenship curriculum across North America since 2001 to instill in new readers the desire to help distant others. Embracing third-wave feminism's celebration of girls' resistance to patriarchy and the pleasures of gender performativity and non-normative gender identities, *The Breadwinner* is about a literate Afghan girl, Parvana, who crosses gender boundaries and dresses as a boy in order to provide for her family when her father is captured by the Taliban.[93] In contrast to the logic of difference produced within

[93] The phenomenon of Afghan girls whose parents dress them as boys so that these children can attend school and work in the market is widespread, and has been documented by *New York Times* journalist Jenny Nordberg (2014). In the Dari language, these children are called *bacha posh* ("dressed like a boy"). It is important to note that I do not offer an interpretation of the *bacha posh* in this chapter. My focus is instead on how Ellis represents this phenomenon and what function such representations serve in *The Breadwinner*.

Nussbaum's international feminism, *The Breadwinner* operates primarily through a logic of similitude that casts Parvana as a literate and empowered agent who does not require assistance and thus more closely resembles contemporary neo-liberal post-feminist norms of Western girlhood – what Angela McRobbie (2004) calls the "top girl" – than colonial and Orientalist representations of the Afghan woman as an uniformly passive and mute "illiterate Third World woman." However, I shall also show that, despite this difference, *The Breadwinner* appropriates gender-variant and trans discourses and identities to resurrect an Orientalist division between the West as accepting of what Judith Halberstam (1998) calls "female masculinity" (or of expressions of masculinity in those with female-identified bodies)[94] and the East as a place where a hierarchal and rigid sex/gender order sentences female-identified subjects to a life of invisibility and illiteracy associated with traditional ideals of femininity. Hence, despite its third-wave feminist rhetoric of empowerment and gender variance, I argue that *The Breadwinner* nevertheless replicates the neo-imperial division between the West and the Rest at the heart of Nussbaum's second-wave feminism. It does so by positing the West's sex/gender order as epitomical of freedom, casting the neo-liberal post-feminist figure of the "top-girl" as the exemplar of feminist liberation and the normative ideal that all children should aspire to replicate, and thereby collapsing cultural difference into "the mirror image of the same" (Yeğenoğlu 1998, 87).

[94] J. Halberstam (1998) coined the term "female masculinity" to refer to a range of expressions of masculinity in women (including masculine heterosexual women, tomboys, butch lesbians, and drag kings) as well as in and among trans-men. In more recent work, Halberstam (2012a, 2012b) advocates the use of "female masculinity" to describe female-to-male gender variance in non-Western cultures (including the Afghan *bacha posh* or girls who dress like boys), since this term allows for a range of gender identifications that cannot be captured by terms – such as queer or trans – that have their origins in the Western LGBTQ movement.

This chapter therefore approaches international feminism, not as an inherently progressive and oppositional social movement innocent of power, but instead as an object of "persistent critique" that must be investigated for how it constitutes both its subject of action and object of violation (Spivak 1999a, 110). In other words, I read international feminism as what Foucault calls a "discursive formation": a regime of knowledge that is both produced through and productive of fields of power. According to Foucault, discursive formations create both their subjects and objects of investigation; establish the rules governing the range of possible truth claims that can be made about these objects; are circumscribed by a "politics of truth" that determines "the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true" (Foucault 1980, 131); and provide the "systems of dispersion" within which diverse, and sometimes seemingly "incompatible," theoretical perspectives emerge (Foucault 1972, 31). While the rhetorical strategies of the capabilities approach and *The Breadwinner* differ in important ways – the former appeals primarily to the trope of victimization while the latter appeals to power and empowerment – I argue that both are variations of the same discursive formation:[95] both produce Western girls and women as the true subjects of feminism "who can save those suffering from human rights abuses," while simultaneously casting people in the global south solely "as objects of charity and care" (Grewal 2005, 152, 130); both grant the Western liberal feminist the right to know the "truth" about and to instruct the "illiterate Third World Woman" outside any ethical debate or contestation (Razack 2008); both

[95] My approach is inspired by Meyda Yeğenoğlu's (1998) study of nineteenth-century colonial feminisms. She shows that, while some colonial feminists appealed to a rhetoric of difference between Western and non-Western women and others to rhetoric of similitude, both rhetorics remained constrained by and reproduced the discursive structure of Orientalism.

posit the Western sex/gender order as the unmarked norm in relation to which non-Western subjects should shape their lives; and both thereby render invisible and unintelligible the desires, subjectivities, and modes of knowing of the "illiterate Third World woman."

That international liberal feminism perpetuates colonial relations by granting the role of the liberated feminist subject only to Westerners, while positioning women of the third world as sexually-subordinated and politically-immature victims, is not a novel observation. Since Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar's (1984) "Challenging Imperial Feminism" and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's (1991) "Under Western Eyes" appeared in *Feminist Review*, critics have consistently highlighted the class privilege, racism, and neo-colonialism at the heart of many international feminist projects. While this chapter draws upon this critical tradition, it also suggests that the images of the liberated Western feminist and the injured "illiterate Third World Woman" at the heart of today's liberal international feminism are not simply mirrors of the past. They instead must be located in the particular historical conditions of their production – conditions that are typically obscured within international feminism itself (Barlow 2000). Hence, in addition to examining how the logic of coloniality is reproduced in both second- and third-wave international feminism, and charting the similarities between these seemingly different approaches, this chapter has yet another goal: to situate both in the profound changes in feminist citizenship and politics that have occurred over the last three decades in Anglo-American states. Put differently, I suggest that international feminism represents a

response not only to the suffering of female subjects "over there," but also to the political climate "over here" that shapes its global agenda and activism.

In particular, I propose that Nussbaum's capabilities approach and Ellis's *The Breadwinner* be read as distinct responses to the decentering of second-wave feminism precipitated by the simultaneous emergence of third-wave feminism and post-feminist discourse in the West. While third-wave feminism offers an internal critique of the limitations of second-wave feminism in order to reclaim and reinvent the feminist movement, neo-liberal post-feminist political culture (as I suggested in Chapter One) instead represents a repudiation of feminist politics. Appropriating the liberal feminist demand for women's equal access to education and paid employment, post-feminism celebrates Western women as subjects of educational and employment success so as to shut down spaces for feminist activism in the West and render feminism *passé*. I read Nussbaum's capabilities approach, and its emphasis on the victimization of the "illiterate Third World Woman," as a melancholic response to this changing terrain of feminist politics in the West – in particular to the loss of a stable political identity of and space for second-wave feminism that has accompanied third-wave feminism's post-structuralist critique of the category "woman" at the heart of the second-wave and post-feminism's closure of the state to feminist claims-making. And, following Weigman (1999), I explore what anxieties about, and political desires for, the future of liberal feminism are reflected in and addressed by her campaign to rescue the injured "illiterate Third World Woman." In contrast, I approach *The Breadwinner* as part of the "complex effort" by third-wave feminism "to negotiate a space between second-wave and post-feminist

thought" (Kinser 2004, 135). I suggest that *The Breadwinner* navigates this space by adopting the post-feminist neo-liberal discourse of female success. Moreover, I propose that post-feminism functions therein not solely to differentiate third-wave from second-wave feminism, but also to defend against the loss and vulnerability that the novel's representations of the suffering and death caused by the Afghan war might provoke in readers.

I. Literacy and Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach

Before I address what I view as the limitations of Nussbaum's international feminism, I shall first outline her relationship to liberal feminism and provide an overview of the central features of her capabilities approach to international development. Nussbaum's capabilities approach represents an attempt to mainstream key tenets of second-wave liberal feminism into international development institutions. Contemporary liberal feminism emerged in the 1960s, as the second-wave of the feminist movement in North America protested female exclusion from the public sphere. Claiming for women the status of the autonomous, rational, and rights-bearing citizen reserved within liberal-democratic polities only for men, liberal feminists challenged patriarchal traditions and customs that reduced women to the status of men's dependents and relegated them to the private sphere of the home. These feminists demanded the extension to women of the rights and opportunities historically granted only to men, the equal participation of women in all aspects of public life, and thus the elimination of gender-based discrimination in law, politics, education, and employment (Arnot 2009). As Wendy Brown (1995) puts it in her analysis of identity-based social movements of the second-

half of the twentieth century, second-wave feminism drew attention to the injuries and harm caused by the denial to women of the "educational and vocational opportunities, upward mobility, relative protection against arbitrary violence, and rewards for merit" that undergirded the liberal project (59-60). At the same time, these feminists retained a faith that the liberal state could redress such injuries and protect women from harm and discrimination through legal and institutional change (Fraser 2009).

Since the advent of second-wave feminism, this liberal feminist project has been criticized by other feminists who challenge its individualism, commitment to formal equality over structural transformation, and privileging of reason over emotion and care (Kapur 2013). Nussbaum (1998) acknowledges that liberalism has often failed women. But, she argues that feminist critiques of liberalism overlook its "radical feminist potential": particularly its commitment to the equal dignity and moral worth of each person (56). The task of international feminism, Nussbaum (1998, 2000) claims, is not to relinquish the liberal project, but to further develop it to more adequately respond to the unjust circumstances of many women's lives world-wide (see Quillen 2001-2002; Kapur 2013). This requires adapting the principles of second-wave liberal feminism – especially its critiques of traditional practices that deny women full personhood, autonomy, rights, dignity, and choice – into a universal framework for global justice.

For Nussbaum (1998), the capabilities approach to international development represents just such a "reformulated" liberal feminist framework (57). Since the early 1990s, Nussbaum has published numerous books and articles on the capabilities approach. In what follows, I focus on the account of the capabilities approach, and the

philosophy of moral universalism that underlies it, that she develops in *Women and Human Development: the Capabilities Approach* (2000) and *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (2011). In both texts, she defines her capabilities approach as a normative political theory that outlines the minimum level of entitlements that must be available in all nation-states in order for each person to live a "fully human life" (2011, 78). Building upon Amaryta Sen's account of human capabilities in "Rights and Capabilities" (1984) and *Development as Freedom* (1999), Nussbaum (2004) advances the capabilities approach as an alternative to the existing neo-classical economic orthodoxy within development institutions that privileges market efficiencies and economic growth over human development. Drawing attention to the quality of human life within and across nations, the capabilities approach instead promotes human capabilities: "what people are actually able to do and to be" (Nussbaum 2000, 100). For Nussbaum, the notion of capabilities refers not solely to an individual's "internal capabilities" (such as knowledge and skills), but also external conditions – to opportunities and liberties – that allow for the realization of those capabilities (84-85). As she points out, the existing social, political, and economic context may either hinder or enable individuals to develop and deploy such abilities. Nussbaum (2004) proposes that global justice requires that international development agencies and governments secure a basic level of capability for all through public policy that ensures equal opportunities for human flourishing.

While Sen originally developed the capabilities approach as a method to compare quality of life across nations, he refrained from advancing a specific list of universal

human capabilities (Maddox 2008). In contrast, Nussbaum (2000) identifies ten central human capabilities: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination, and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; relation with other species; play; and control over one's political and material environment (78-80). She proposes that the capabilities on her list are universal. The list is based, she suggests, on an intuitive understanding of what all people, regardless of cultural difference, view as a necessary precondition for "truly human functioning": those central capabilities without which a person cannot be counted as fully human (76). While this list is universal, Nussbaum claims that it does not represent a paternalistic and imperialist imposition of Western ideals on others who have their own views of the good life. Rather, she suggests that her list is open-ended, revisable, and subject to democratic deliberation and debate. It thus leaves room for "reasonable pluralism" in how each culture adopts the list according to its own "local beliefs and circumstances" (77).

Nussbaum argues that the list provides only a partial theory of justice. It specifies a "threshold" of capabilities: a minimum level that that each person must attain if each is to lead a life worthy of human dignity and flourishing, and not be treated merely as "instrument of the ends of others" (12, 2). Moreover, her commitment to political liberalism means that, while she promotes these capabilities as a necessary precondition for truly human functioning, she believes that, once the "bare minimum" has been met, individuals should be left to decide how and whether to use any of them (5).[96] As Julie MacKenzie (2009) puts it, the capabilities must be available to all, but none should be

[96] See Jaggar (2006) for a discussion of Nussbaum's approach to political liberalism. See MacKenzie (2009) for an overview of Nussbaum's universalism.

coerced to use them. Citing one of Sen's examples, Nussbaum explains this principle as follows: "The person with plenty of food may always choose to fast, but there is a great difference between fasting and starving, and it is this difference that I wish to capture" (87; Nussbaum 2011, 25; see also MacKenzie 2009).

For Nussbaum, the capabilities approach is applicable to all nation-states. However, she uses this approach primarily to criticize cultural practices that she believes harm poor women living in poor countries of the global south (Jaggar 2005). Nussbaum (2000) claims that women in developing nations are frequently treated as "instruments of the ends of others" (2), as caregivers of male members of households and reproducers of communities "rather than as ends in themselves" (247); they receive only a small portion of the world's opportunities, and have unequal human capabilities in areas such as "health, education, political liberty and participation, employment, self-respect, and life itself" (Nussbaum 1995, 1). Drawing upon the research of Martha Chen and following in the tradition of liberal feminism, Nussbaum (2000) holds that this "capability failure" is primarily caused by patriarchal customs and traditions (6; Jaggar 2005). According to Nussbaum (1995), cultural traditions in many parts of the world create and sustain injustice by portraying "women as less important than men, less deserving of basic life support, or of fundamental rights that are strongly correlated with quality of life, such as the right to work and the right to political participation" (1). And, she suggests that for women to live truly human lives, they must be treated as autonomous subjects, with equal rights and opportunities. Challenging what she sees as a tendency toward cultural relativism in Western feminism, Nussbaum (1995) argues that this unjust situation of

women in developing nations calls for "moral stand-taking" by feminists on those local customs that harm women (2; Jaggar 2005).

Nussbaum argues that female illiteracy in the global south is one locus of gender injustice that requires such "moral stand-taking." By Nussbaum's (1995, 2004) account, female illiteracy is primarily the consequence of traditional practices that discriminate against girls and women. Gender hierarchies within families, parents' preference for male children, and cultural traditions such as early marriage for girls ensure that male children have greater access to education, and thus that boys and men are more likely to be literate than girls and women. The unequal division of household labour, domestic violence, cultural norms (such as *purdah*), and religious beliefs about female purity often seclude adult women in the private sphere of the home and prevent them from attending adult literacy classes (Nussbaum 1995, 2000, 2004). At the same time, illiteracy limits women's liberties and opportunities: it condemns women to low-skill employment, and leaves them with limited bargaining power for basic resources within families and with few options to leave abusive relationships (Nussbaum 2004). Echoing the early liberal feminist Mary Wollstonecraft's (1792) argument that women's circumscribed intellectual opportunities in a patriarchal society leaves them feebleminded and irrational, Nussbaum (2004) similarly claims that, denied education, illiterate women are "cut off from the fully human use of their faculties"; reduced to the status of men's subordinates, they are sentenced to an "animal-level of functioning" (337).

In "Women's Education: A Global Challenge," Nussbaum (2004) outlines the place of literacy in her capabilities approach. She argues that literacy is a universal value,

and locates it in her list of central human capabilities within the category of "senses, imagination and thought" (352; Street 2011). Following in the tradition of what Street (2011) calls the "autonomous model" of literacy (581), Nussbaum (2004) views literacy as a set of technical reading and writing skills and suggests that these skills are not only intrinsically important to women's flourishing.[97] They are also needed to secure the other capabilities on her list: literacy allows women to move from the private sphere of the home into improved employment opportunities and the political process; it improves women's health and emotional well-being by allowing them to gain a sense of self-worth and "the important social good of self-respect" (335; Maddox 2008); it provides them with an "inquiring habit of mind" and enables them to "cultivate the powers of thought and expression" (336); and it is connected to women's ability to collaborate and develop political collectives with other women for social change (Charusheela 2009). Just as second-wave liberal feminism in the West challenged gender-differentiated education and claimed girls' and women's right to access the same educational institutions as boys and men as a precondition for their entrance into the public sphere (Arnot 1997, 2009), Nussbaum (2000) also claims for literacy the power to liberate women from the constraints of culture and to enable them to live "lives that are fully human" (4). Nussbaum (2004) therefore argues that "what is at stake in literacy is no mere skill but human dignity itself and the political and social conditions that make it possible for people to live with dignity" (334). And, for Nussbaum, as for second-wave liberal feminists more generally, the role of nation-states and international institutions is to

[97] For Street's critique of Nussbaum's approach to literacy, see Street (2011).

remedy the unjust circumstances of women in the global south by providing what UNESCO calls "education for all."

II. Nussbaum's Colonial Legacies

It is to Nussbaum's credit that she has drawn the attention of mainstream development institutions to female literacy and highlighted the blind spots in international education policies that privilege primary schooling while neglecting the importance of adult basic education and literacy to achieving gender equality (Unterhalter 2005). There can be no doubt that the low rates of functional literacy skills amongst women worldwide are symptomatic, at least in part, of relations of gender subordination that grant women less access to education than their male counterparts, and that such inequalities are unjust and should be addressed by public policy that funds and promotes adult education. Yet, my concern is with how the long history of colonial discourse on literacy – and its deployment to separate the civilized from the barbarous, the human from the infrahuman, the modern from the traditional – resurfaces in Nussbaum's capability approach and provides the implicit framework through which she conceptualizes the lives of women in the global south. At the core of Nussbaum's vision of international feminism is the stereotypical image of the "illiterate Third World Woman" that we first encountered in Chapter One: a mute and inert body and mind, perpetually victimized by her culture, who is not yet a wholly developed person, and thus requires assistance and guidance. This is not to suggest that Nussbaum wholeheartedly embraces neo-imperial narratives on the "illiterate Third World woman." In contrast to the new imperialism's erasure of the epistemic, moral, and political agency of Afghan women, Nussbaum (2000) suggests that

the "illiterate Third World woman" – while underdeveloped mentally, emotionally, and politically – retains a core of human dignity that is blighted, but never completely annihilated, by the denial of literacy and education. Yet, despite this important difference, her work contains many features common to colonial and neo-imperial representations of literacy.

For instance, Nussbaum's (2004) association of literacy with the ability "to use the senses, to imagine, to think and reason" and with the power to automatically ameliorate women's economic and political well-being is reminiscent of colonial constructions of literacy as a precondition for entrance into humanity (352). It echoes the "Great Divide" between literacy and orality advanced by scholars of modernization, such as Goody and Ong (which I discussed in Chapter Two), who suggest that literacy is key to the exercise of rationality, the development of complex social structures, and the workings of a modern community. And, just like these modernization theorists, Nussbaum also posits illiteracy as incommensurable with these abilities (Street 2011). For Nussbaum, literacy is the precondition for a fully human life of dignity and self-respect, which she defines as a modern life free from culture. Illiteracy marks off the space of the not-yet fully human, of those who are closer to animals than humans, lacking autonomy and agency.

As we have seen, this logic of coloniality operated historically and in the present-day to justify imperial violence against and control of non-Western populations. What political work does it accomplish in and for Nussbaum's version of international feminism? To be fair, Nussbaum appeals to the distinction between the literate and the

illiterate, the human and the infrahuman, modernity and tradition in order to protest what she sees as the injustices enacted against the "illiterate Third World woman" by her traditional culture. Yet, despite such benevolent intentions, her capabilities approach creates a new form of epistemic violence against and control over the "illiterate Third World woman." The logic of coloniality that undergirds Nussbaum's approach produces the "illiterate Third World Woman" as an infrahuman object of violation in need of protection from her culture. And, in so doing, it also enables Nussbaum to usurp the moral and epistemic authority to produce knowledge about the "good" and the "truth" and thus to instruct "illiterate" women on how their capabilities might be best developed to permit their full entry into the category of the human (Razack 2008).

As Alison Jaggar (2006) notes, Nussbaum's implicit claim to moral and epistemic authority is evident in both her justification for and creation of her list of universal human capabilities. Nussbaum (2000) develops what she calls a "non-Platonist substantive good approach" to defend the universality of her list (158). While substantive good approaches typically use independent standards of value to justify moral claims, Nussbaum argues that her approach is "non-Platonist": it appeals to cross-cultural coherence among peoples' beliefs as moral justification rather than an independently-existing moral reality (Jaggar 2006). According to Nussbaum, her list is the product of cross-cultural dialogue among philosophers, feminist groups, and illiterate women in India. The capabilities approach thus "already represents what it proposes: a type of overlapping consensus on the part of people with otherwise very different versions of human life" (quoted in Jaggar 2006, 312). However, as Jaggar (2006) observes, Nussbaum's claims of inclusiveness

and respect for the voices of those women she deems "illiterate" are undermined by the hierarchical relations of epistemic authority that undergird her attempts to represent and know other women's desires. For instance, Jaggar (2006) notes that throughout *Women and Human Development* (as well as in other essays), Nussbaum draws from narrative accounts of two Indian women – Vasanti and Jayamma – to corroborate the accuracy of her capabilities approach. Indeed, Nussbaum (2000) presents herself as a "neutral" recorder of Vasanti's and Jayamma's testimonies (10). Yet, as Jaggar (2006) points out, Nussbaum never questions either her power as a collector and interpreter of their stories or how differences of power and privilege might have affected her conversations with them. Moreover, while Nussbaum claims that her text allows these subaltern women "to speak for themselves," her book contains only two direct quotations by both; the women's testimonies are instead filtered, channelled, and conceptualized by Nussbaum in order to provide evidence for her capabilities approach (Jaggar 2006, 306; Okin 2003). Indeed, in Nussbaum's work, both women are hypostatized as illiterate and underprivileged victims of gender discrimination: their voices appear only as evidence of Nussbaum's claims that capabilities deprivation sentences illiterate women to a less-than human life and that these women desire the economic, political, and intellectual capabilities on her list.

Nussbaum's narrative method thus evinces what what Marina Larzeg (2002), following Foucault, calls a "will to power": "the power to carve out a space for others" to speak, but also to "convene them to talk about themselves" to her so that she can build her theory from them (127). Hence, while Nussbaum claims that her list is a product of

cross-cultural dialogue, women like Vasanti and Jayamma are not equal participants in the formation of her moral theory; their desires and lives serve solely as data in support of Nussbaum's universalist theory (Jaggar 2006). Indeed, Nussbaum (2000) admits this much when she claims that dialogue with poor women is "epistemologically valuable" because "it tells us that our intuitions about what would make political consensus possible are on the right track" (quoted in Jaggar 2006, 319). Nussbaum's narrative method of moral justification is therefore, as Jaggar (2006) puts it, "covertly authoritarian": it provides only the Western feminist philosopher the moral and epistemic authority to collect these women's narratives and to use their desires and preferences only when they confirm her already-existing capabilities approach (318).

That Nussbaum assumes the power to define the content of her supposedly universal capabilities approach, despite her claims to the contrary, is also evinced in her theory of adaptive preferences (Jaggar 2006). Nussbaum (2000) claims that, while the capabilities approach respects people's desires, most women's preferences are the result of "ignorance," "injustice," "blind habit," and unjust social conditions, and thus are "deformed" (114). Maladaptive to unjust cultural practices, they do not provide an adequate justification for the good life (Jaggar 2005). Nussbaum (2000) nevertheless believes that women's desires should inform conceptions of the good. However, she suggests that women's preferences can be trusted only once the capabilities are secured for all and they therefore can make informed decisions (she calls this an "informed desire" approach) (161). Moreover, according to Nussbaum, desires can be considered

"informed" only if they reflect the items on her list; she views desires that contradict her list as epistemologically unreliable (Jaggar 2005, 2006).

For Nussbaum, those with informed desires conceive of themselves primarily as liberal autonomous rights-bearing citizens. For instance, Nussbaum (2000) claims that, while Vasanti's adaptation to unjust customs was the "shallowest" of the "illiterate" women Nussbaum interviewed, Vasanti only developed informed desires once she became literate and learnt to view herself as a rights-bearing citizen (140). When Nussbaum met her

> she did not yet have the conception of herself as someone who has been wronged, who has a right not to be abused, and to seek both employment and credit on the basis of equality with men. Over the years, she learned these concepts, and now teaches other women to see themselves as *rights-bearers* (140).

The problem with Nussbaum's theory of adaptive preferences, as I see it, is not that she highlights the extent to which women's desires may be informed by the patriarchal context in which they develop, and thus that such desires must be critically reflected upon for how they might uphold unequal gender hierarchies before they are used as a basis for moral philosophy. Most feminists, from liberal to post-structuralist, would agree that gender relations and ideologies shape the desires and imaginations of feminine (and masculine) subjects. Rather, the issue here is that Nussbaum only recognizes other women's desires as informed if they match the items on her list. In so doing, Nussbaum posits Western liberal feminist norms of womanhood as paradigmatic of freedom. And,

this leads her to distinguish between two groups of women: those literate women, freed from the weight of tradition and custom, who conceive of themselves as autonomous individuals with rights to protection under the law and thus have reliable preferences; and those illiterate, silenced women trapped in their culture who "have their freedom to choose restricted" and thus are not even aware of their status as wronged victims (Razack 2007, 3).

Nussbaum's capabilities approach thus operates through a logic of difference that divides the Western liberal feminist – or those non-Western women who must closely resemble this subject position – from the "illiterate Third World woman," whose own desires and preferences cannot provide an adequate foundation for international feminism. This division excludes the "illiterate Third World woman" from equal participation in international feminism and installs the modern Western liberal feminist subject as international feminism's moral centre. It thereby precludes any serious ethico-political engagement with the desires, knowledge, and modes of communication of those women who do not understand themselves first- and foremost as liberal rights-bearing subjects.[98] Since Nussbaum equates agency solely with the adoption of a liberal feminist subjectivity, "illiterate" women like Vasanti and Jayamma can appear within Nussbaum's

[98] See Razack (2008) for a similar critique of the liberal feminist project. As Jaggar (2006) notes, a further example of this exercise of moral and epistemic authority can be located on the final page of *Women and Human Development*, which outlines the report of a women's collective in rural Andhra Pradesh. Nussbaum (2000) takes the collective's desire for fruit trees, herbal medicine, travel, and education as evidence that these women desire the capabilities on her list, and thus that her "capabilities approach is the systematization and theorization of just such thoughts and plans" (quoted in Jaggar 2006, 314). However, as Jaggar observes (2006), the correspondence between the women's list and Nussbaum's is weak. I would add that the women's list does not necessarily reflect their transformation into liberal subjects demanding rights.

vision of international feminism only as silent and injured victims. Nussbaum cannot recognize how poor women in the global south, while oppressed in many ways, always act within the various forms of possibility and constraint that characterize all social contexts.

As Saba Mahmood's (2011) study of female participation in the Egyptian Islamic revivalist movement reveals, feminist scholarship grounded in a liberal discourse of autonomy and freedom from community most commonly views women who hold traditional religious values as uncritical and passive adherents to patriarchal customs; such interpretations, however, elide how these women's self-construction as pious subjects and their religious practices represent forms of agency and criticality that cannot be accounted for in a liberal feminist framework as anything else but adaptive preferences to male-dominated cultural traditions. Yet, as Mahmood's ethnography reveals, such "modalities of agency" should not be wished away as evidence of victimization simply because they defy liberal feminist accounts of political freedom (22). Yet, it is precisely these forms of agency that remain invisible to Nussbaum, who celebrates the liberal autonomous subject as the ideal form of freedom and agency for women.

Furthermore, the primacy Nussbaum grants to technical reading and writing skills in the development of women's capacity to exercise the "senses, imagination and thought" and for political and economic development leads her to dismiss the already-existing political skills of poor women and to obscure how the use of literacy (or technical reading and writing skills) as a criterion for full personhood might itself be a

form of injustice. To explore this critique in more depth, I turn to Nkiru Nzegwu's (1995) study of non-literate Igbo women's political organizing in Nigeria (see also Charusheela 2009). Nzeqwu shows that urban-poor and rural non-literate Igbo women have been disenfranchised from the existing political structures and economic opportunities. However, in contrast to Nussbaum, she claims that this is not the result of their adaptive preferences to traditional cultural norms that devalue women. It instead stems from the legacy of British colonial policies in Nigeria, which denied women education, employment, and decision-making powers and imposed Western gender ideologies of male dominance and female subordination on a pre-colonial culture in which women held key political, economic, and administrative roles. Despite this colonial imposition, however, non-literate women remained politically active in local indigenous Women's Governing Councils, which continued the pre-colonial traditions of granting women decision-making roles in their communities and which provided the foundation for the 1929 Women's War against the patriarchal exclusions enacted by British colonial authorities in Nigeria. In contrast, after colonization, it was primarily literate elite women who were depoliticized because they rejected as "primitive African" the Igbo tradition of celebrating female assertiveness and collectivity, and identified instead with "civilized" Western gender norms of female submissiveness (Nzegwu 1995, 450). Nzegwu (1995) notes that "uneducated" Igbo women continue to "retain a stronger sense of their identity, and a greater degree of control over their lives" than literate upper class women (451).

As S. Charusheela (2009) contends, Nzegwu's discussion of poor Igbo women's political organizing shows that functional literacy is not always necessary for "the

flourishing of the senses, thought, and imagination," or for political consciousness and activism, despite Nussbaum's claims to the contrary (1142). I suggest that it furthermore reveals that Nussbaum's capabilities approach to education, which focuses primarily on equal access and opportunity, fails to sufficiently account for *how* people develop capabilities through their participation in the decisions that affect their lives and in popular democratic struggles against heteropatriarchy, colonialism, and neo-colonialism (a topic I explore in more depth in Chapter Four) (Quillen 2001-2002; Lebowitz 2007).

As Nzegwu (1995) notes, despite this history of poor women's political resistance, development planners in Nigeria still prioritize literacy classes as necessary to raise poor women's political awareness, rather than focus on structural factors that prevent indigenous women's flourishing. One of these structural factors is the institutionalization of literacy – by employers, the government, and development agencies – as the criterion for equal access to employment and political opportunities (Charusheela 2009). Literacy, far from being a panacea, thus functions in this context to justify the economic and political marginalization of those women classified as "illiterate," to legitimate an unequal division of mental and manual labour between literate and "illiterate" women, and thus to uphold a system of class and gender relations of ruling that devalue poor women's political acumen and skills.

Nzegwu's historical analysis of Igbo women's political organizing, and of the ruling relations that render such activism invisible, offers an important critique of Nussbaum's literacy/illiteracy division, which posits literacy as an intrinsic value necessary for human flourishing and illiteracy as sentencing women in the third world to

a life of political apathy and conformity to patriarchal values. However, Nzegwu's article is important not solely because it develops an alternative framework for approaching poor women's lives. As Charusheela (2009) points out, it is also significant because Nzegwu's article appears as the final chapter of *Women, Culture, and Development* (a volume co-edited by Nussbaum), and Nussbaum's introduction to the volume responds to Nzegwu's critique. There, Nussbaum's (1995) reads Nzegwu as offering as "a vigorous defence of one traditional conception of women's role" and as a celebration of cultural relativism in contrast to Nussbaum's own universalist framework (12). As Charusheela (2009) observes, Nussbaum ignores Nzegwu's warning that her article not be read as a romanticized nativism or defence of culture, but rather as critique of development scholarship that privileges literacy as criterion for full personhood. Nussbaum instead filters Nzegwu's critique through a tradition/modernity binary framework. This framework enables Nussbaum to (mis-) read Nzegwu's article solely as a celebration of Igbo tradition and to chastise her for ignoring the continuing obstacles to women's equality in Nigeria (including low literacy rates) (Charusheela 2009). Hence, just as Nussbaum's theory of adaptive preferences allows her to disregard the desires of those women who are not deemed functionally literate, the tradition/modernity framework undergirding Nussbaum's capabilities approach permits her to ignore those aspects of Nzegwu's critique that challenge both cultural relativism and universalism and that draw attention instead to structural power imbalances between and among women. Nussbaum's framework thus leaves no place for an analysis of literacy's role in perpetuating social injustices that is not reduced to a naive cultural relativism that, at best,

affirms cultural particularities or, at worst, provides a morally reprehensible defence of women's subordinate status (Charusheela 2009).

Yet, as Nzegwu's approach reveals, a more thorough-going analysis of gender injustice in the global south must move beyond this false opposition between universalism and relativism, and instead take seriously the impact of structural violence and the legacies and contemporary practices of imperialism on poor women's lives. In the case of Igbo women, such an analysis would necessitate exploring the links between local relations of gendered power, broader histories of colonization, and the structural violence associated with neocolonial economic and geopolitical policies (including the Structural Adjustment Policies of the 1980s that exacerbated poverty levels among women in Nigeria and oil-based industrialization by foreign countries that dispossessed rural women of farmland) (Turner and Oshare 1993; Nzegwu 1995). In contrast to this complex analysis of poor women's oppression, Nussbaum instead reduces gender injustice to local traditions. In so doing, she abstracts patriarchy from these other axes of oppression that shape not just women's lives but gender relations themselves.

This leads her not only to obscure the multiple causes of injustice in poor women's lives, but also to argue that the very Western nation-states and foreign-owned corporations that perpetuate neo-colonial geopolitical and economic relations in non-Western states can remedy the literacy crisis of women in the global south through their donor agencies and corporate philanthropy (Jaggar 2005). Indeed, while Nussbaum (2004) openly criticizes development institutions' privileging of the market over human development, she nevertheless claims that Western states and multi-national corporations

(M.N.C.s) should invest in female literacy education in order to increase the economic growth and productivity of developing nations. Echoing the "gender equality as smart economics" framework that informs U.S. literacy policies in Afghanistan (see Chapter One), Nussbaum associates literacy with women's economic efficiency, maternal health, and population control. Her effort to integrate female literacy into the policy machinery of international donor agencies and M.N.C.s thus leads her to shift her capabilities approach to fit institutional priorities. This results not only in the depoliticization of literacy and the advancement of feminist issues as instrumental goals (Baden and Goetz 1998). The reframing of gender equity in terms of economic efficiency and population control (rather than sexual and reproductive justice) also has the effect of simultaneously putting "the blame for the exhaustion of the world's resources between the legs of the poorest women of the South" and turning capitalism into women's only escape from their reproductive burden and toward their human development (Spivak 1999a, 416). In so doing, Nussbaum renders invisible the structural features of capitalism that create the very global inequalities that produce poverty and that position Westerners as "helpers" (Jaggar 2005). Instead, literacy re-emerges in Nussbaum's work as a remedy for gender oppression and as a colonial gift to be bestowed on the "illiterate Third World woman" by benevolent Westerners who know what is best.

III. Melancholic Subjects and Suffering Objects

Nussbaum's moral universalism is premised on ideas of a common humanity and natural equality amongst peoples. However, the logic of coloniality operates within her capabilities approach to install the Western feminist as the subject of international

feminism, to produce poor and "illiterate" women exclusively as wronged victims who are unable to help themselves, and to obscure the broader social and political relations of violence that shape these women's lives. As we have seen, despite the presence of feminist critics (such as Nzegwu) who challenge Nussbaum's failure to account for the non-literate women's agency, Nussbaum nevertheless remains invested in the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" as the proper object of international feminism and in the literate/illiterate, human/infrahuman, modernity/tradition division as its underlying framework.

In this section, I suggest that Nussbaum's investment in the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" reveals that something else has motivated her vision of international feminism than simply a concern with the plight of poor women in the global south. Her work must also be understood as a reaction to the loss of political space for second-wave liberal feminism in the West. On the one hand, the version of second-wave feminism that informs Nussbaum's capabilities approach has been called into question by third-wave feminists, who challenge both its essentialism and its focus on female victimization over female agency. On the other hand, the ascendency of post-feminist discourse in the West has resulted in the erosion of many of second-wave feminism's political gains. Some feminists have responded to this changing political terrain by moving away from the identity of "woman" as victim as the organizing motif of feminism. Nussbaum's vision of international feminism instead turns to universalist values in order to restore a secure foundation for feminist political unity rooted in female victimization.

As I argued in the previous section, Nussbaum's appeal to the "illiterate Third World woman" as the proper object of, and foundation for, international feminist activism reflects a politics of certainty that operates by reducing the complexities of the lives and agency of poor women in the global south to an assertion of their victimization by traditional patriarchal non-Western cultures. In what follows, I suggest that this politics of certainty has other important functions in Nussbaum's oeuvre. It works to alleviate Nussbaum's own anxieties about the future of liberal feminism (Wiegman 1999); and, it provides international feminists (such as Nussbaum) with a foundation for their own "politicized identities" in post-feminist times (Brown 1995, 73).

That Nussbaum's capabilities approach is inspired not solely by an earnest and benevolent concern for the suffering of women in the third world, but also by the emergence of third-wave feminist critiques of second-wave feminism's attachment to female victimization is evinced by the central place that the figure of the "illiterate Third World Woman" occupies in her infamous *ad hominem* attack on Judith Butler's post-structuralist theory of gender performativity. In her 1999 *New Republic* article, "The Professor of Parody," Nussbaum dismisses Butler's *Gender Trouble* as representative of the "hip defeatism" and "naively empty" politics characteristic of third-wave feminism in the West (37, 45). In particular, Nussbaum takes to task Butler's claim that the identity of "woman" is nothing more than a regulatory fiction produced through a sustained and repeated set of acts and stylizations of the body. Not only does Nussbaum question the originality of Butler's theory of gender as performance, suggesting that it has its roots in second-wave feminist accounts of the social construction of gender. More troubling to

her is Butler's proposal that, since the identity of "woman" is a product of repeated gendered acts, resistance can occur only through parodying gender norms, and not through laws and institutions that normalize the gender binary. For Nussbaum, Butler's popularity amongst young, Western, university-educated third-wave feminists has led to the dominance of a form of "self-involved" symbolic politics in which self-stylization, subversive gestures, and the cultivation of the self have come to replace the material and institutional politics that was the focus of second-wave feminism (44).

According to Nussbaum (1999), Butler's symbolic politics is thus emblematic and, indeed, the cause of Western feminism's failure to address "the texture of social oppression and the harm that it does" (42). For Nussbaum, Butler's post-structuralism robs feminism of it proper referents – "real women," "real bodies," and "real struggles" – that have historically provided the foundation for the legitimacy of liberal feminism (37) (see also Wiegman 1999). And, more significantly, it "collaborates with evil" by replacing a politics of language and discourse for an "old-style feminism" attendant to "the material suffering of women who are hungry, illiterate, violated, beaten" (45, 38). Nussbaum finds this "old-style" feminism that "work[s] for others who are suffering" alive and well in the Indian women's movement (44). Nussbaum claims that feminists in India

> have thrown themselves into practical struggles, and feminist theorizing is closely tethered to practical commitments such as female literacy, the reform of unequal land laws, changes in rape law…the effort to get social recognition for problems of sexual harassment and domestic violence. These

> feminists know that they live in the middle of a fiercely unjust reality; they cannot live with themselves without addressing it more or less daily, in their theoretical activities and in their activities outside the seminar room (38)

Nussbaum suggests that Indian feminists derive their theory from the practical struggles of "real" women: the suffering Indian woman, whose hunger, illiteracy, bodily violation, and poverty can be alleviated only by legal and institutional remedies to redress her injuries. As Wiegman (1999) notes, the figure of the "illiterate Third World Woman" therefore serves in Nussbaum's essay as a "referent for the real" (118). It is deployed to justify Nussbaum's (1999) claim that the material conditions of suffering and practical commitments to addressing injustice are more pertinent to feminist politics than Butler's strategy of parodying gender norms, which offers "only a false hope": "Hungry women are not fed by this, battered women are not sheltered by it, raped women do not find justice in it" (45). And, it therefore follows, illiterate women are not made literate by it.

Nussbaum claims that, in contrast to the naive provincialism of Butler (who supposedly ignores the suffering of the "illiterate Third World Woman"), she is paying "attention to the struggles of women outside the United States" (37-38; Wiegman 1999). However, it is worth noting that this attention derives primarily from Nussbaum's concern that Western feminism has lost its way and must be found if it is to recover its political agenda of helping suffering others. As Clare Hemmings (2011) notes, such narratives of loss and return characterize many feminist laments over the lack of political unity precipitated by third-wave and poststructuralist interventions in feminism. Particularly instructive for my purposes here is Hemmings (2011) observation that in

most "return narratives" it is "through interventions 'elsewhere,' in contexts assumed to lag behind Western feminism's equality agendas that a feminist subject will be able to redeem herself" (212). Indeed, for Nussbaum (1999), Indian feminism's "practical commitments" are significant not simply because they provide a rejoinder to Butler's supposed narcissism (37). Even more important is that Indian feminism repeats the history of U.S. feminism: while present-day post-structuralist feminists privilege theory over activism, Nussbaum celebrates Indian feminism for following in the footsteps of second-wave U.S.-based feminists, such as Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin, who not only took seriously female victimization but also sought to transform the law to protect women from harm. As Wiegman (1999) notes, Nussbaum positions U.S. second-wave feminism as the template for other feminist movements throughout the world. At the same time, as Ratna Kapur (2001) points out, she homogenizes Indian feminism, ignoring both its histories of struggle and diverse theoretical traditions (including those inspired by Butler). In so doing, she turns Indian feminism into an anachronism: stuck firmly in U.S. feminism's past, Indian feminism serves as a reminder of a time before the authentic feminist project of MacKinnon and Dworkin was unsettled by post-structuralism (Wiegman 1999; Kapur 2001). The paradox of Nussbaum's "Professor of Parody" is therefore that, while she heralds Indian feminism as the solution to Western feminism's decadence (both its decay and its fall), by positing Indian feminism as a remnant of U.S. feminism's past, she nevertheless reproduces the neo-imperial claim that the origins of feminism lie exclusively in the West, and thus that the West is superior to the non-West. As Kapur (2001) notes, Nussbaum seems to genuinely respect Indian

feminist movements and traditions of critique. However, while she may not intend to repeat this doctrine of Western superiority and non-Western backwardness, it is nevertheless produced in and through her text.

Nussbaum's critique of Butler thus installs the identity of the injured "illiterate Third World Woman" in need of protection as the moral grounding of an international feminism attendant to "the real situation of real women" (38). As Wiegman (1999) suggests, she finds in female victimization and powerlessness an epistemological and ontological foundation for the truth and certainty of the Western feminist project that has been undone by third-wave feminists such as Butler. Nussbaum's investment in the suffering "illiterate Third World Woman" as the proper object of feminism, and her political attachment to the "old-style" feminism of MacKinnon and Dworkin, therefore must be read, at least in part, as a melancholic response to the loss of a stable and coherent foundation for feminist politics.

My interpretation of Nussbaum's melancholia is inspired by the work of psychoanalytically-informed feminists, such as Wendy Brown (1999), who have drawn upon Freud's account of melancholia to analyze the political Left's reliance on "anachronistic" political analysis and projects (20; Georgis 2009). In his famous essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud (1964) suggests that the difficult psychic work involved in coming to terms with loss – not only of a person who was loved but of a cherished ideal as well – is fragile and interminable. This work can lead to two general forms of psychical attachment to the lost object: mourning or melancholia. As relations to loss, mourning and melancholia are characterized by "the same painful frame of mind,

the same loss of interest in the outside world…the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love" (252); both therefore constitute complex psychical reactions to the lost object. Mourning, however, maintains the difference between the self and the lost object by "working through," "bit by bit," one's libidinal attachment to what has been lost and reconstituting the self in relation to that loss (Freud 1964, 266). In contrast, melancholia represents the inability to acknowledge the loss, the repudiation of mourning, and thus the refusal to grieve (Butler 2004). In other words, melancholia is a nostalgic response to loss that idealizes the lost object, refuses to sever any attachments to it, and therefore introjects the object into the ego, narcissistically identifying with the lost object so as to avoid losing it (Britzman 2000; Butler 2004). In doing so, the melancholic not only forecloses the working through of loss, but also "replaces the lost object with the experience of loss itself" and thus continually repeats or "acts out" the loss (Salverson 2000, 63).

In her critique of the contemporary Left politics, Brown (1999) uses Freud to argue that the left's political investments in past forms of political mobilization and solidarity rooted class struggle are melancholic: they represent both a refusal to come to terms with the political demands of the present and a narcissistic longing for a past unity that never was (see also Georgis 2009; Roy 2009). In a similar vein, I suggest that Nussbaum's attachment to suffering women also represents a clinging to the lost unity and certainty of second-wave feminism. This attachment "supersedes any desire to recover from the loss, to live free of it in the present" or to even acknowledge the loss at all (Brown 1999, 19). Attached to an image of the past in which second-wave feminists

worked for women who suffer, Nussbaum turns second-wave U.S. feminism into a fetish, a "thing-like and frozen" entity (Brown 1999, 22). Nussbaum's feminist melancholia idealizes the lost object, at once keeping the object alive while at the same time shielding it from critical scrutiny and rendering it uncontestable. As Wiegman (1999) notes, this enables Nussbaum to evade the history of Western feminist debates both over what constitutes the identity of "woman" and whether seeking protection from the law and the state risks affirming the very patriarchal relations of gender subordination that feminism seeks to challenge. Rather than engage these debates, Nussbaum instead idealizes the second-wave feminist tradition and its emphasis on women's victimization as the "political guarantee" of feminism's future (Wiegman 1999, 116).

Thus far, I have suggested that Nussbaum's investment in second-wave feminism's concern with female suffering and with the state as protectors against injury represents a melancholic response to third-wave feminism's decentring of the second-wave feminist project. Yet, Nussbaum's attachment to past forms of feminism must also be located in the context of the dismantling of the Keynesian welfare state, the rise of neo-liberalism, and the ascendency of post-feminist discourse in the West, which together have eroded the political space once occupied by second-wave feminists. As feminist historians of the welfare state reveal, the second-wave of the women's movement and the Keynesian welfare state developed in a symbiotic relationship:[99] welfare liberalism's promotion of state intervention to mediate social inequalities opened up new political spaces for feminists to make claims for state recognition of the suffering and injuries

[99] See Piven 1990; Brodie 1995, 2008; Banaszak et al. 2003; Beckwith 2007; and Fraser 2009.

caused by women's historic exclusion from the liberal state and thus for state protection against gendered harms (Brown 1995). Indeed, Nussbaum's commitment to legal reform and working within the state to garner protections for women necessitates the existence of just such an interventionist welfare state. The emergence of neo-liberalism as the new governing orthodoxy in Western democratic states during the 1980s and 1990s, however, delegitimized the philosophy of social liberalism that informed and created the political terrain within which mainstream liberal feminism achieved gains for women. As I argued in Chapter One, neo-liberal policies of privatization and deregulation have closed off the state as the primary site of claims-making for feminists, and diminished "political space for women, metaphorically and literally" (Dobrowolsky 2004, 188). While this closure originally occurred in the 1980s and early 1990s through a backlash politics that cast feminists a "special interest group" opposed to the interests of the "ordinary citizen" (Brodie 1995, 71), this repudiation of feminism has given way to a more conciliatory post-feminist appropriation of the discourse of liberal feminism by the neo-liberal orthodoxy (Brodie 2008; Eisenstein 2009; Fraser 2009). As we have seen, no longer is feminism disparaged as self-interested; neo-liberals now claim that the issues raised by liberal feminism have been responded to, that gender equality has been achieved by the state, and that feminism is therefore redundant.

Hence, while second-wave liberal feminists relied upon attachment to pain and injury in order to make claims on the liberal state, post-feminist discourses of female success have foreclosed the political identity of the Western woman as a wounded victim of gender discrimination that undergirded Western liberal feminism. Post-feminism has

therefore attempted to render untenable a politics of injury – such as the one endorsed by Nussbaum. As Dorothy Chunn (2007) notes, since the late 1980s neo-liberals have divided Western feminists into two camps: "good" equity feminists "who insist that they are now equal to men and feminist struggles are located elsewhere" and "bad" feminists who argue for the continuing relevance of feminism in the West (48). As I alluded to in Chapter One, within this post-feminist logic, only one particular version of feminism – a liberal internationalist one organized around the presence of an injured "illiterate Third World woman" – continues to be seen as politically legitimate in the West (Eisenstein 2004). It therefore follows that liberal feminism's political recognition by Western states requires the existence of an injured woman abroad in need of feminist rescue.

Nussbaum's attack on Butler never explicitly addresses this changing terrain of feminist citizenship in the West. However, this context offers some insight into why, as Ratna Kapur (2001) astutely notes, "a U.S. theorist is obliged to go halfway around the world" in search of suffering women, especially "when we consider the routine pillorying of 'welfare mothers' and the only too-plausible allegations of rape...as an instrument of control in the bloated U.S. prison system" (80). As Amy Farrell and Patrice McDermott (2005) note, the rise of international liberal feminism in the U.S. must be understood not simply as a response to third world women's victimization, but also as an attempt to renew the legitimacy of feminist activism in a U.S. context hostile to the feminist movement. Writing about the U.S.-based Feminist Majority Foundation's (F.M.F.) campaign to rescue Afghan women, Farrell and McDermott note that this campaign served a strategic function for the organization: it mobilized U.S. women to support

feminist activism and legitimated the existence of the F.M.F. in a "post-feminist era" (47). This campaign was "key to keeping the U.S. women's movement alive" (47); moreover, as Farrell and McDermott suggest, by the end of the twentieth century, "this activism and emphasis on the victim status of third world women were central to the very construction of American feminism...and womanhood" (47). In other words, the victimized third world woman both provides international feminism with its *raison d'être* and shores up the very identity of the Western woman as the one who rights the wrongs of suffering girls and women elsewhere.

Nussbaum's political investment in the other woman's suffering might similarly be understood as an outcome and symptom of this closure of political space to second-wave liberal feminism in the West. It represents an attempt to re-secure the continuing political recognition and survival of the liberal feminist project *itself* at a time when this project is under assault and the plight of women in the third world is considered its only valid domain. While Nussbaum would not claim that feminism is dead in the West and is needed here only to be exported elsewhere, the doctrine of Western exceptionalism that informs her work comes very close to repeating the post-feminist discourse that equality has been achieved in the West. These resonances with post-feminism are particularly evident in her suggestion that Indian women are still dealing with manifestations of gender subordination – such as a misogynist rape law and illiteracy – that "the first generation of American feminists…[already]…targeted" (Nussbaum 1999, 38). With this claim, Nussbaum assumes what Uma Naryan (1997) calls Western feminism's

"colonialist stance" (40): its belief that Western women are more advanced and liberated than non-Western women (see also Kapur 2001).

As I suggested in Chapter One, discourses of Western gender and sexual exceptionalism operate through a double move: such discourses simultaneously disavow the ongoing prevalence of gender injustice in the West and displace the very mechanisms of gender oppression onto the non-West. This structure of disavowal and displacement is operative in "Women's Education: A Global Challenge." There, Nussbaum (2004) produces a dividing line between "women in developed countries" – who "do not have to struggle to become literate [because] it is foisted upon them" (332) – and "rural women in India and Bangladesh" – who "choose it, fight for it, grab hold of it" (342). This dichotomy presents literacy as Western property, and thus reproduces colonial conceptions of literacy as Western. Moreover, just as the civilizational logic of the new imperialism that I outlined in Chapter One elides unequal educational opportunities in the West and displaces illiteracy onto the Afghan woman in order to bolster the fantasy of Western supremacy, Nussbaum similarly constructs the figure of the "Western woman" as more free in comparison to the "illiterate Third World women" who must struggle daily for literacy. Obscuring the class, racial, and generational differences between women that structure their access to literacy and education in the West, Nussbaum replicates the neo-imperial division of the world into two different sex/gender orders: the liberal West, where women have equal educational opportunities; and the illiberal non-West, where women face unjust patriarchal traditions that "old-style" Western feminism has already resolved. In so doing, Nussbaum affirms (at least inadvertently) the post-

feminist claim that illiteracy is a problem for women "over there" but not for women "here." It is this division that, as Jaggar (2005) notes, allows Nussbaum simultaneously to abrogate the power to know what is best for non-Western women and to secure her own innocence (and thus abdicate responsibility for this power) by defining the goal of international feminism as "working for others who are suffering" (see also Wiegman 1999).

IV. Third-Wave Feminism in Deborah Ellis's *The Breadwinner*

While Nussbaum's capabilities approach to international feminism replicates the rhetoric of victimization and injury characteristic of much second-wave feminist thought, contemporary liberal feminist internationalism has increasingly distanced itself from this rhetoric. Instead, it has deployed third-wave feminist rhetoric and political strategies to articulate its vision of global feminism. While there are many variants of third-wave feminism, it is characterized primarily by its "inability to be categorized" (Gilmore 2001, 218). Some critics identify third-wave feminism with feminist interventions in popular culture: the do-it-yourself culture and social media activism of young feminists;[100] popular culture texts that celebrate individual resistance to patriarchy (Gillis et al. 2004); and the power feminism of liberal feminist Naomi Wolf (1993), who emphasizes the pleasures and powers of female identity rather than female dependency and subordination. Others locate the origins of third-wave feminism in anti-racist challenges to white feminists and the racism within the second-wave (Miles et al. 2001). Others, still, associate it primarily with poststructuralist, queer, and trans interventions in feminist

[100] See Bell (2002); Harris (2008); Freeman (2009); Piepmeier (2009).

thought that explicitly question the Western sex/gender binary and embrace the fluidity of gender and sexual identity (Stryker 2004; Halberstam 2012). In this section, I explore how certain aspects of third-wave feminism – particularly its concern with female power and empowerment, individual forms of resistance to patriarchy, and the pleasures of gender performativity and "female masculinity" (Halberstam 1998) – inform the representations of Afghan girlhood and boyhood that circulate in *The Breadwinner*, a best-selling children's novel used in the primary curriculum across North America as part of global citizenship education.

The Breadwinner is written by Canadian author and international feminist Deborah Ellis, a Governor General award-winning author and founder of Canadian Women for Afghan Women (C.W.4.W.Afghan). First published in 2000, *The Breadwinner* was re-released shortly after 9/11 and exists alongside a growing body of children's and young adult literature that has emerged in the post-9/11 context about the lives of girls and women in Afghanistan (Sensoy and Marshall 2010). The novel revolves around the life of an 11-year-old child, Parvana, who lives with her family in Afghanistan during the Taliban's rule. After her father is arrested by the Taliban because of his Western university education, Parvana becomes the breadwinner for the family. In order to enter the public market in Kabul, where girls and women are not permitted unless accompanied by men, Parvana dresses and passes as a boy. While her mother and sisters are represented as confined to the private sphere of the house, unable to enter public space, and sequestered in their *burqas*, Parvana's male "disguise" – as Ellis (2000, 72) calls it – allows the child to move freely around Kabul. Finding pleasure in her masculine

performance yet identifying as a girl, Parvana earns money for her family by becoming a letter reader and writer for illiterate Afghans, all the while undertaking adventures with her friend, Shauzia, who is also dressed as a boy.[101] Although the novel is about the plight of Afghan girls and women, it is also, as a *Newsweek* review puts it, a "girl power parable" (quoted in Sensoy and Marshall 2010, 295). Not an illiterate, passive, voiceless, or vulnerable feminine figure, Parvana is instead a girl who survives on her own precisely because of her literacy.

Ellis' construction of the Afghan girl as an empowered and literate social actor is part of a larger trend toward the proliferation of powerful girl heroes in children's literature and popular culture since the 1990s. As Rebecca Hains (2009) notes, girl power stories "break the mold" of traditional children's texts in which those with male bodies are alone allocated the heroic role; "by placing girls at the centre of narratives with active agency and unfettered power," these children's texts offer a version of Wolf's (1993) power feminism for a younger audience (92). Indeed, in *The Breadwinner*, Parvana is rendered intelligible to Western readers largely through a rhetoric of girl power that casts her as the embodiment of the celebrated characteristics of young womanhood espoused within popular forms of third-wave feminism that celebrate empowerment and individual forms of daily resistance to patriarchy (Sensoy and Marshall 2010). Parvana is educated, strong-willed, and assertive. She therefore epitomizes the characteristics of what Anita Harris (2004) calls the "can-do girl": a girl who is independent, successful, resilient and

[101] I use the gender pronouns "she" and "her" when referring to Parvana. While Parvana embraces her masculine performance, the child continues to refer to herself as a girl after her gender transformation and is identified by the narrator as female.

self-inventing, and who thus resists those qualities of submissiveness, victimization, and restriction to the private domestic sphere associated with traditional femininity (13; see also Griffin 2004). And, just as other third-wave feminist cultural texts (such as *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* and the children's cartoon *The Powerpuff Girls*) celebrate the exceptional woman with supernatural powers who challenges gendered conventions (Hains 2009), Ellis portrays Parvana as an "exceptional" figure who rejects the traditional feminine roles to which her mother and sisters are relegated by the Taliban and assumes a masculine gender presentation that differentiates her from other Afghan girls.[102]

Parvana's freedom and agency are signified most dramatically in the novel by the child's gender-troubling transformation from feminine to masculine. While at first Parvana is reluctant to assume a masculine "disguise," and to venture into the market alone, the child experiences the process of becoming-boy and her performance of masculinity as pleasurable. After her hair is cut and styled as a boy's, not only does Parvana "feel like a different person," but she also refuses her mother's desire to save the remnants of Parvana's long hair as a memento of her femininity (Ellis 2000, 66). Adorned in male attire, Parvana becomes a tea-boy in the marketplace, and the child relishes both her masculine performance, which she continues at home, and the duties she assumes by virtue of her new identity as boy (Harper 2007).[103] By decoupling sex from

[102] See also Sensoy and Marshall (2010). Children's literature scholar Clare Bradford (2007a) suggests that this textual strategy of exceptionalism is characteristic of Western children's literature on Muslim girls and settler society historical fiction, in which "indigenous characters are routinely treated as exceptional within their cultures" (74; 2007b).

[103] Hence, while Ellis describes Parvana's masculine gender presentation as a "disguise," the text itself works against the view that the girl's masculinity is hiding or concealing her "true" identity. Indeed, within the novel Parvana's identity transforms as she takes on the performance of

gender, Ellis's representation of Parvana's cross-dressing embraces the third-wave feminist challenge to the Western sex/gender binary system within which masculinity is tied exclusively to the male-identified body (Harper 2007); it thereby simultaneously denaturalizes and pluralizes masculinity, revealing it to be a social and cultural production and set of performative iterations that can be enacted by any body (Halberstam 1998; Noble 2004). Indeed, to the extent that Parvana takes up the performance of masculinity and enjoys this performance while still identifying as girl, the character's "female masculinity" reveals that there can be "masculinity without men" (Halberstam 1998, 2).

Ellis's portrayal of Parvana's cross-dressing therefore highlights the incoherence and non-identity of sex with gender (and thus the mutability of gender assignment), and the instability and complexity of gender identities. In so doing, it calls into question how the boundaries between male and female, or masculine and feminine, are established as inevitable and unchanging in the first place (Harper 2007). It thus can be read as offering a critique of both Western binary sex/gender norms and the state-sanctioned gender discrimination advanced by the Taliban. Hence, *The Breadwinner*'s third wave feminist non-essentialist approach to gender offers child readers an opportunity to consider, as Harper (2007) suggests, "whether gender is or is not just an act, open to change, and if so, whether performances, state enforced or not, should or might be changed" (515). At the same time, it challenges Western cultural anxieties about expressions of masculinity by those with female-identified bodies and the stigma attached to those masculine girls who

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masculinity; the child thus challenges the cisnormative gender binary in which gender identity aligns with the sexed body, which the language of "disguise" reinforces.

defy norms of traditional femininity. It therefore shares with third wave feminists and queer theorists, such as Halberstam (1998), the desire to redefine masculinity and to ensure that "masculine girls and women" can wear their masculinity "with a sense of pride and power" (xi).

Hence, in contrast to the rhetoric of victimization and injury that undergirds Nussbaum's capabilities approach, Ellis's third wave feminism articulates an image of international feminism grounded in the gendered postcolonial agency of "third world girl," as Özlem Sensoy and Elizabeth Marshall (2010, 229) put it, and the pleasures and powers of gender non-conformity and variance. *The Breadwinner* thus represents an important challenge to the pre-existing figure of the "illiterate Third World Woman" and to the reification of patriarchal injuries that provides the foundation for Nussbaum's second-wave feminism. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to portray third-wave feminism in general and *The Breadwinner* in particular as an uncontested improvement on Nussbaum's second-wave feminism. Indeed, while the third-wave's emphasis on agency rather than victimization is often heralded as evidence of feminism's progress and advancement, such a celebratory discourse often prevents critical interrogation of the third-wave's limitations: of those moments when its celebration of girl power and its appropriation of gender-variant and trans discourses might also converge with neo-liberal and imperialist projects (Haritaworn et al. 2014).

One limitation of the third-wave feminism that informs *The Breadwinner* is located in how its rhetoric of girl power and individual resistance to patriarchy "verges dangerously close to…(post)feminism" (Gillis et al. 2007, xviii). For instance, while

Parvana's success at breaking traditional gender norms may be read as testimony to the third-wave desire to celebrate girls as powerful and to acknowledge the plurality of gender identifications that challenge the Western sex/gender binary, *The Breadwinner*'s rhetoric of individual empowerment also overlaps with the new normative role for female subjects advanced by neo-liberal, post-feminist culture in the West. Post-feminist culture, as I noted in Chapter One, draws from homonormative and post-racial discourses to constitute young women (regardless of sexuality or "race") as subjects of educational and employment success who have achieved gender equality and thus are no longer in need of feminism or state assistance. While these new discourses celebrate girlhood, I have shown that they are also modes of regulation tied to global capitalism's demand for a flexible labour market and that they prioritize and normalize the experiences of white and middle class girls. They are linked to the creation of a neo-liberal subject, what McRobbie (2009) calls the "top girl," who is heralded by post-feminist discourse not for her reproductive role but for her productive capacities (54): for her ability to take her place as a citizen-worker and to approximate the "Universal Breadwinner" model of citizenship rather than the older caregiver model that equated female citizenship with motherhood (Fraser 1994, 601). Just like the Western figure of the "top girl," Parvana is "hard-working, motivated, and ambitious," and earns an independent income (McRobbie 2007, 733). She is "the breadwinner," and her entrepreneurial qualities mimic those ascribed to the ideal neo-liberal self-reliant and market citizen.

Hence, while Nussbaum responds to post-feminism's closure of political space for feminism by appealing to third world women's victimization, *The Breadwinner* instead

navigates this changing terrain of feminist citizenship in the West by accommodating the hegemonic post-feminist discourse of success. Since it is Parvana's literacy and employment in the public sphere that frees her from the constraints of traditional femininity, the novel establishes the post-feminist path to individual freedom as the normative model of agency regardless of gender identity or geographic locale.[104] Thus, if Nussbaum's response to post-feminism can be faulted for producing a simplified feminism based on a rhetoric of victimization that is abstracted from the everyday lives of poor women in the global south, the alignment of post-feminism and third-wave feminism promoted by *The Breadwinner* produces what Amber Kinser (2004) calls a "weak" feminism (124): one that identifies power solely with entrance into the marketplace, embraces the philosophy of individualism undergirding neo-liberal capitalism, and thereby leaves aside the complex structures of oppression that structure children's lives (particularly in the context of war).

This "weak" feminism is evident not only in the novel's complicity with post-feminist discourse, but also in how its logic of similitude – which casts Parvana as an

[104]This is not to suggest that all representations of female-to-male gender crossings uphold relations of power. One problem with much second-wave feminist scholarship on gender variance is that it tends to criticize those who identify with female masculinity and trans-men as traitors of feminism who "sell out to patriarchy" by choosing the privileges of manhood rather than remain "women" and challenge female subordination (Raymond 1979). Such claims have been rightly criticized as cis-sexist and transphobic since they posit all female-to-male gender reversals and transformations as complicit with patriarchy and, in so doing, reify feminist politics as rooted in the identity and experiences of only people assigned the sex of female at birth and whose gender identity as feminine corresponds to this sex assignment (MacDonald 1998; Elliot 2010). Still, I suggest that we need to situate such representations of gender variance in relation to issues of racialization, economics, and geopolitics. My argument here is that Ellis's representations of Parvana as the breadwinner, while challenging the stability of gender boundaries and identities, nevertheless reinforces neo-liberalism and, as I suggest below, Orientalist constructions of the "East." For discussions of the need to situate queer and trans politics in relation to issues of neo-liberal capitalism, empire, and Orientalism, see Puar (2007) and Haritaworn et al. (2014).

exemplar of the Western post-feminist "top girl" – occurs in the novel alongside a logic of absolute difference that ultimately reproduces colonial discourses of "Oriental" femininity and Western superiority (Sensoy and Marshall 2010). This colonial discourse is evident in Ellis's representations of the "Window Woman," a figure who inhabits the interior of the house next to the market where Parvana works and who serves in the novel a metonym for all of Afghanistan's imperilled women. Not able to leave her home, and blocked from Parvana's sight by the blackened window ordered by the Taliban, the Window Woman makes herself known to Parvana only by throwing small gifts through the window. Imagining the Window Woman as a princess, and herself as a knight in shining armour, Parvana fantasizes about saving the woman by "climbing up the wall, smashing the painted–over window with her bare fist and helping the princess down to the ground" (Ellis 2000, 115-116). In a partial reversal of the classic masculinist rescue narrative outlined in Chapter One, Parvana assumes the role of the knight, a heroic role normally reserved for white characters with male bodies in children's literature. Yet, while this racial and gendered role reversal counters and queers some prescribed identifications, it does not make Parvana's rescue fantasy any less prone to reproducing neo-imperial representations of the Afghan woman as a passive object who requires rescue.

The logic of coloniality is also at work in how Ellis depicts Parvana's masculine dress as more progressive than the *burqa* worn by Afghan women. While Ellis's representations of Parvana's cross-dressing breaks with older colonial discourses in which non-binarist gender identities were viewed as deviant and monstrous (as I outlined

in Chapter Two), the novel posits Parvana's crossing of gender boundaries from girl to boy, from feminine to masculine, as evidence of Western superiority and Oriental backwardness. The novel is thus in keeping with a larger trend toward what Jasbir Puar (2007) identifies as the incorporation of (some) queer subjects into empire – particularly those who bolster the doctrine of Western gender and sexual exceptionalism. For instance, Ellis portrays Parvana's family's embrace of her cross-dressing as a consequence of her parent's "Western education," which allows her father, upon his release from prison, to accept her as "both daughter and son" (Ellis 2000, 139; see also Harper 2007). This production of the West as accepting of gender variance and female-to-male cross-dressing is juxtaposed to representations of *burqa*-clad Afghan women whose forced veiling is portrayed as exemplary of "Oriental" femininity and female subordination under traditional patriarchy.

As I suggested in Chapter One, this representation of the veiled woman as an index of the backwardness of Eastern cultures has a long colonial history. Western Orientalist representations of the veiled woman were central to male travellers' depictions of the Orient as barbaric in its treatment of women and to their anxieties about the anonymity and interchangeability that the veil seemed to permit the Muslim women they documented (Said 1979; Alloula 1987; Loomba 1998). In a similar Orientalist fashion, *The Breadwinner* depicts veiled women as a homogenous group whose attire masks their individuality by rendering their bodies invisible to the viewer's gaze and by making them indistinguishable from each other. This forced invisibility produced by the *burqa* is contrasted in the novel to the invisibility afforded to Parvana when she assumes

masculine attire (Harper 2007). Dressing as a boy allows Parvana the freedom to move through public space without notice: "Now with her face open to the sunshine, she was invisible in another way. She was just one more boy on the street. She was nothing worth paying attention to" (Ellis 2000, 70). While the invisibility of women under their *burqas* is portrayed as a symbol of female victimization, the invisibility permitted masculine bodies is figured in this passage as liberation from constricting gender norms and from the patriarchal confinement of women to the private spheres of the *burqa* and the home, a confinement to which other Afghan women are sentenced. Hence, while Ellis allows for the exceptional figure of Parvana to resist the prescribed version of third world womanhood as victim, other Afghan women in the text are associated solely with passivity and helplessness (Sensoy and Marshall 2010).

Ellis's equation of masculine dress with agency and the *burqa* with subordination not only reproduces Orientalist representations of Muslim women as uniformly oppressed; it also produces Western forms of adornment as necessary for freedom. As Sensoy and Marshall (2010) propose, Parvana's "cross-dressing occurs alongside mainstream Western audience expectations that girls should be unfettered by the requirement to cover themselves and their faces" (303). By defining normative dress for girls and women as involving the process of unveiling and thus as Western, Ellis forecloses the possibility of exploring alternative femininities, including the contested history of veiling in the Middle East and South Asia (Sensoy and Marshall 2010). Moreover, it presents "female masculinity" exclusively as a way of escaping patriarchal gender roles and of assuming a Western gender identity. The text thereby provides little

insight the local meaning and significance tied to the experience of gender variance and "female masculinity" in places like Afghanistan. At the same time, it shuts down inquiry into how Westernized sartorial practices are themselves technologies of regulating gendered bodies. As Yeğenoğlu (1998) suggests, the decision not-to-veil is itself a political activity of inscribing the body with particular social and political meanings: it "is another way of turning the flesh into a particular type of body"; nevertheless, within the history of Western feminism "the body that is not veiled is taken as the norm for specifying a general, cross-culturally valid notion of what a feminine body is and must be" (114).

Hence, even though Parvana challenges the Western sex/gender binary in which gender is expected to cohere unproblematically with sex, a key strategy in Ellis's novel, is to construct Parvana – through representations of her masculine dress, mobility, education, and employment – as "more 'like us' [Western subjects] than those homogenized women" to whom the girl is compared (Bradford quoted in Sensoy and Marshall 2010, 50). That *The Breadwinner* relies as much on a logic of similitude as it does on a logic of absolute difference between the West and the East, however, does not make it any less susceptible to charges of complicity with the logic of coloniality than Nussbaum's capabilities approach to international feminism. Indeed, as Roderick McGillis (2000) suggests, colonial literature frequently appeals to both similarities and differences between cultures:

> neo-colonialism manifests itself as both a depiction of minority cultures as inveterately other and inferior in some way to the dominant European or

> Eurocentric culture, or as an appropriation of other cultures – that is, an assimilation of minority cultures into the mainstream way of thinking (xxiv).

Meyda Yeğenoğlu (1998) similarly notes that while similitude and difference appear to be divergent methods of representing the "other" – with the logic of sameness producing more "positive" images of the other than "negative" images of difference – both operate as two sides of the same coin. As strategies of representation, similitude and difference function to translate the other into the self's terms and to thereby render invisible the specific geographies, histories, and politics of different cultures (Yeğenoğlu 1998). On the one hand, the logic of absolute difference – such as that deployed by both Nussbaum and Ellis – reifies "minority cultures," categorizing them in opposition to the self-definition of the West as modern and advanced. On the other hand, the logic of similitude represents the other as identical to the Western self, thus re-establishing the universality of Western culture and rendering differences between cultures equivalent.

Hence, although one could read third-wave feminist narratives of individual triumph over patriarchy, like *The Breadwinner*, as producing an image of Afghan girlhood that is less pejorative than the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" that undergirds Nussbaum's narratives of female victimization, I argue that such "positive" images do not constitute a break with the discursive formation of international feminism. These narratives instead reproduce many of its limitations: particularly its power "to produce a regime of truth about the other and thereby establish the identity and the power of the subject that speaks about it" (Yeğenoğlu 1998, 90); to construct Western gender norms as the pinnacle of freedom; and to produce the third world woman as victim.

V. Post-feminist Pedagogies of Empire

Since 9/11, *The Breadwinner* has been widely used as an instructional resource in many North American schools as part of the liberal arts and global studies curriculum (Greenlaw 2005; Sensory and Marshall 2010). Given that *The Breadwinner*'s third-wave feminist rhetoric of empowerment replicates both post-feminist discourses of neoliberal success and the coloniality of Nussbaum's approach, we need to read it not only for how this fictional text reproduces doctrines of Western gender and sexual exceptionalism. We must also consider what happens when the text travels into the North American classroom and is used by educators therein. What do Western children learn when they learn to read from this novel and how does this text shape the subjectivities of those who learn to read from it?

Feminist educational approaches to integrating *The Breadwinner* into the primary curriculum have been motivated by the wish that the novel will inspire students to "learn the importance of thinking critically about injustices in the world" and will thereby produce them as "citizens of the world" whose moral obligation and loyalty is limited not to the "local" (family, community, or nation) but to humanity as whole (Greenlaw 2005, 45). Yet, while educational theorists hope that by reading the novel students will learn to identify with Parvana and empathize with suffering girls and women elsewhere, they also worry either that students may not see any relation to the text or that learning about the suffering of Afghan women might provoke despair and breakdown, not hope and global solidarity, amongst students (Greenlaw 2005). These worries reflect educational theorists' anxieties over resistances to learning. But they speak more broadly to the crisis

of pedagogy: to pedagogy's inability to predict how knowledge of social breakdown will affect learners, and thus to its incapacity to adequately respond to and contain the psychical events it sets in motion (Felman 1992; Britzman 2000). As Shoshana Felman (1992) notes, while pedagogy must risk an encounter with loss and suffering if it is to compel students to make points of connection with an-other's life, learning from traumatic knowledge might itself produce a trauma (the inability to make meaning of an event) in the learner and thus precipitate either a refusal to learn or a breakdown of the self.

In the case of *The Breadwinner*, James Greenlaw (2005) proposes that this crisis of pedagogy, and the attendant difficulty of making meaning from war and social breakdown, can be solved through the post-feminist figure of Parvana. He reads Parvana as a model of "courage and conviction" that can encourage students to connect to the novel and learn more about poverty and war (58). This pedagogical approach is founded on the belief that Western students might more easily understand and identify with non-Western experience if it is framed according to familiar images of heroes and victims (Britzman 2000). Yet, As Britzman (1998, 2000) notes, while pedagogical strategies rooted in the use of "role models," idealization, and familiarity are predicated on the well-intentioned desire to teach children to empathize with distant others, idealization and empathy may instead work to incite forms of narcissistic identification that collapse the difference between the self and other, shore up idea(l)s of supremacy and omnipotence, and thereby ward off feelings of loss and anxiety that accompany encounters with another's suffering.

As we have seen, the novel establishes an equivalence between Parvana and Western experiences of "girl power" and gender variance – an equivalence that is established primarily in contrast to the suffering of other Afghan women. It therefore interpellates its readers as subjects who should desire the same gendered and economic success as Parvana and who should thus be able to heroically overcome all obstacles to this success, unlike the passive Afghan women who require rescue (Sensoy and Marshall 2010). While Parvana may be read as an example of a form of girl power that triumphs against the odds, this "recourse to hope and courage may serve as the learner's ego-ideal...[which]...has the potential to become a means to berate either the self or those who cannot be considered courageous" (Britzman 1998, 120). In other words, identification and over-familiarity with the girl-power protagonist both defends against encountering the self's vulnerability and can result in aggression against those children (including the "passive" "illiterate Third World Woman") who require help. Thus, rather than enable students to make a connection with other children's lives, the post-feminist rhetoric of heroism and empowerment that circulates in the novel may instead operate as a psychic defence against the loss and vulnerability constitutive of pedagogical encounters with difference, violence, and war. Such rhetoric shuts down the possibilities for Western students to deal with their own experiences of loss and suffering and to refashion themselves as ethical subjects that are able to risk an encounter with loss and "accept that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed" (Butler 2004, 21). And, it thereby forecloses the possibility for students to make ethico-political connections to the suffering of others.

The idealization of Parvana as a "role model" also defends against the possibility of cultivating such ethico-political connections because it prevents learning from the history of the conflict in Afghanistan. Such learning might move beyond simplistic dichotomies of heroism and victimage and compel a recognition of one's implication in the lives of another that is not based solely on sympathetic identification or appeals to absolute difference (Britzman 1998). This denial of implication is produced by what Spivak (1999a) calls the "sanctioned ignorance" about the history of Afghanistan actively sustained by the novel itself (319). While the author's note at the end of *The Breadwinner* mentions the role of the U.S. in supporting the Taliban, the history presented within the novel itself is silent on U.S. involvement in the region, focusing solely on the Soviet occupation as the precursor to the Taliban's rule (Sensoy and Marshall 2010). This strategic silence prevents readers from connecting Western foreign policies to the situation of Afghan girls and women; it positions violence against women as a consequence of third world patriarchy alone, while also foreclosing the capacity of readers to locate Afghan women's suffering in a larger geopolitical context (Sensoy and Marshall 2010). Furthermore, I have argued that the idealization of Parvana produces Western girls as more empowered and the West a site of gender and sexual freedom in contrast to the suffering of the burqa-clad and "illiterate" Afghan women. This mode of idealization affirms the post-feminist discourse of girl's newfound success in the West and of the West as accepting of "female masculinity." It thus reproduces the discourse of Western gender and sexual exceptionalism at the heart both of the new imperialism and Nussbaum's capabilities approach. In so doing, it simultaneously reaffirms and shifts

readers' attention away from the forms of gender, racial, and sexual oppression – including violence and discrimination against Muslim girls and gender-variant and non-conforming subjects – in the West that are reproduced within institutions such as education.[105] The textual strategies of identification and difference thus prohibit the cultivation among students of a more complex understanding of the relationship between domination at work "here" and "there." And, just as Nussbaum's political investment in the "illiterate Third World woman" represents, in part, her attempt to resecure a place for second-wave feminism in post-feminist times, *The Breadwinner*'s Western gender and sexual exceptionalism should be similarly understood as a product of, and response to, the post-feminist demand that Western feminism orient itself solely toward saving women "over there" rather than challenging existing inequalities "over here."

That *The Breadwinner*, despite its rhetoric of female empowerment and gender variance, fosters the same type of salvation project that characterizes Nussbaum's second-wave liberal feminist internationalism is also evident in how it has been used in the primary curriculum to link global justice activism to consumer-friendly politics aimed at saving imperilled Afghan women. As I have already suggested, to the extent that the text aligns Parvana with Western girlhood and experiences of gender variance, *The Breadwinner* calls its child readers to imaginatively assume the position of the rescuer of Afghan girls and women outside of any actual interaction with them (Sensoy and

[105] See also Sensoy and Marshall (2010). In an analysis of Suzanne Fisher Staples' young adult novels about the plight of Muslim girls and women in Pakistan, Zine (2014) shows how multicultural education curriculum that uncritically uses such Orientalist novels to teach students about the lives of "other women" contributes to racism against Muslim girls in educational institutions in the West.

Marshall 2010). But the novel also sustains a literal politics of rescue that positions Western students, in general, and girls and women, in particular, as saviors of "illiterate" Afghan women abroad. Since Ellis donates all royalties from the purchase of the book to C.W.4.W.Afghan, school boards and individual readers who purchase the book are participating in a salvation project of bringing schools and education to Afghan girls and women through consumption practices (Sensoy and Marshall 2010). Moreover, since some teachers tie lessons around the novel to fundraising activities for C.W.4.W.Afghan (such as "breaking bread" potlucks and tea parties that are frequently organized exclusively by and for female students), students are encouraged to actively participate in saving Afghan women through financially supporting organizations that promise to "rescue" them (Sensoy and Marshall 2010).

These lessons in global political activism thus teach that the proper form of political activism for Western-based girls and women under neo-liberalism is what Michele Micheletti (2006) calls "political consumerism" (261) and Roopali Mukherjee and Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) call "commodity activism" (1). Given that consumption traditionally has been marked within capitalist orders as a distinctively feminine mode of economic participation (Modleski 2005; Micheletti 2006) and that the post-feminist liberation of girls is today equated with their increased consumption power, this consumerist politics stands as a feminized counterpart to "the masculine politics of militarized rescue" (Bernstein 2010, 63; see also Sensoy and Marshall 2010).[106] But just

[106]See also Sensoy and Marshall (2010). In addition, although the novel was written prior to 9/11, the fact that its popularity as an instructional resource in North America grew during the G.W.O.T. and military intervention in Afghanistan means that its underlying message of saving

like militarized rescue, rescue through consumption produces an unequal distinction between those who help and those in need of help: a distinction that requires the helped to abdicate her decision-making power and submit to her protector's judgement about what is best. Indeed, by instilling in Western students what Barbara Heron (2007) calls the "helping imperative," such global citizenship education ultimately ends up interpellating Western students, in general, and Western girls, in particular, as global citizens who have the ability to make the world better for others, while simultaneously constituting the "illiterate Third World Woman" solely as an object of rescue (6). Hence, despite its third-wave rhetoric of empowerment and gender variance, the kind of international feminism promoted both within the text and by its use within global citizenship education does not substantially differ from Nussbaum's vision of international feminism as "working for others who are suffering." And, just as Nussbaum's capabilities approach shares much in common with the new imperialism, the third-wave international liberal feminism promoted by *The Breadwinner* is also best understood as a post-feminist pedagogy of empire "that perpetuates fantasies of supremacy, entitlement, and global expansionism" amongst Western students (Zemach-Bersin 2012, 101).

VI. C**onclusion**

International liberal feminism is a diverse movement. While some strands are inspired by the second-wave feminist focus on women's injured identities as the moral foundation of feminism, other strands embrace third-wave feminism's celebration of individual empowerment and the pleasures of gender variance. Yet, this chapter has shown that,

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Afghan girls can reinforce the need for military intervention even though *The Breadwinner* does not explicitly support war (Sensoy and Marshall 2010).

despite these differences, at the heart of second-wave and third-wave international feminisms is a renewed "white woman's burden" that is simultaneously oriented toward saving the "illiterate Third World woman" abroad and cultivating the Western feminist subject as a benevolent helper.[107] Both Nussbaum's capabilities approach and *The Breadwinner* reproduce the colonial division between literate and illiterate, human and infrahuman, saviours and those who need saving. By positing Western girls and women as the subjects *par excellence* of feminism, neither allow for the desires and subjectivities of female and gender-variant subjects in the global south to emerge as anything other than evidence of either the backwardness of third world cultures or the supremacy of Western neo-liberal gender norms. At the same time, both Nussbaum and Ellis obscure and implicitly justify the structural power imbalances between the global north and south that enable the Western feminist to assume the position of the saviour in the first place.

This chapter has also shown, however, that while both second- and third-wave international feminisms repeat the logic of coloniality, this repetition needs to be read as a response to debates within the feminist movement over the direction of feminism and to the ascendency of a neo-liberal post-feminist discourse in the West that simultaneously celebrates young women as subjects of success and closes off political space for feminism. While the rhetoric of victimization that undergirds Nussbaum's theorization of the "illiterate Third World Woman" and the rhetoric of heroism that informs *The Breadwinner* represent different attempts to "live feminism in constant tension with post-feminism" (Kinser 2004, 133), both responses ultimately operate as defences against loss:

[107] I borrow the term "white women's burden" from Burton (1994, 146).

the lack of a stable referent "woman" as the foundation of feminism, the closure of political space in the West for liberal feminism, and the violence and horror of war. By turning away from loss and the difficulties of the present moment, and seeking to resecure the political legitimacy of feminism through recourse to the colonial division between free and unfree sex/gender orders, the international feminisms of Nussbaum and Ellis are not only complicit with empire, occupying a similar conceptual and political terrain. They also prevent the development of the very politics of global solidarity and alliance that both second- and third-wave international feminisms aspire to promote.

That an oppositional political movement such as international liberal feminism – which ostensibly aims to achieve universal gender equality beyond all national boundaries – remains circumscribed by and reproduces the coloniality of literacy does not therefore mean that literacy should be eschewed as an inherently colonial construct. But it does point to the necessity for feminists committed to the liberatory potential of literacy to reconceptualize it from the perspective of the oppressed and the subaltern and to articulate an alternative vision of literacy grounded in the epistemic and political agency of those classified as "illiterate" that can challenge the coloniality of literacy. This revisioning of literacy as a liberatory and transformative praxis is central to anti-colonial and postcolonial projects. Appropriating literacy from its colonial legacies, both radically transform its conceptualization and practice. Part Two examines the literacies of decolonization articulated within two such projects, and inquires into how their promises and failures might provide a model for a feminist politics of decolonizing literacies in the present-day.

PART TWO

LITERACIES OF DECOLONIZATION

CHAPTER FOUR

ANTI-COLONIALISM, LITERACY, AND THE LEGACIES OF PAULO FREIRE

The politics of literacy was central to the struggles for decolonization that characterized the anti-colonial movements of the post-WWII era. Such political movements eschewed the colonial definition of literacy as a set of autonomous and politically-neutral technical skills, whose presence or absence can be determined solely by Westerners. However, rather than relinquish literacy *tout court* to its colonial legacies, these projects instead approached literacy as a site of political struggle and resistance. While literacy has been deployed historically and in the present-day to reproduce relations of domination, traditions of anti-colonial thought and activism reveal that it also can be used in the service of political resistance to these oppressive conditions. Such a liberatory approach, however, requires not solely the decolonization of literacy: the wresting of literacy from its imbrication in projects of colonial and imperial power (which has been the focus of Part One of this study). Anti-colonial traditions show that it equally necessitates transforming literacy into an ethico-political act of decolonization.

This chapter analyzes one influential account of literacy as a pedagogy of decolonization: anti-colonial theorist and educator Paulo Freire's theory of "critical literacy." It is impossible in one chapter to address Freire's entire corpus, which spans four decades, or to outline the vast tradition of critical literacy education and its implementation in postcolonial states such as Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Guinea-Bissau,

Grenada, Nicaragua, and Peru from the 1960s to the early 1980s.[108] Rather, in what follows, I focus on only a few of Freire's texts: *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973), *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation* (1985), and *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (1987) (which he co-authored with Donaldo Macedo). I situate the pedagogy of critical literacy elaborated in these texts within the intellectual and historical setting from which it emerged: a setting influenced by the Western Marxist humanist tradition, the works of anti-colonial activist-scholars (such as Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi), and the neo-colonial political culture of Brazil at the time when Freire began his literacy campaigns for the urban and rural poor and wrote his most influential text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.*

Freire's main contribution to the anti-colonial intellectual tradition lies, as Peter Mayo (2004) suggests, in his re-imagining of literacy as a form of "liberating praxis": an activity of learning to read and write "the word and the world" that can enable oppressed peoples to reclaim control of their lives through the processes of critically analyzing the world in which they live (what Freire refers to as "critical reading") and transforming that world (or what he calls "critical writing"). As I shall show, Freire's project of critical literacy not only questions the autonomous model of literacy that informs colonial, neo-imperial, and international liberal feminist projects. It also aims to transform the unequal social relations of intellectual production, pedagogy, and communication upon which the dominance of these approaches relies: relations in which, as we have seen, literacy is

[108] For studies of some of these critical literacy projects, see Barnard (1980); Arnove (1986); Freire and Macedo (1987); Jules (1993); Hickling-Hudson (1999); Mayo (1999); and McLaren (2000).

envisioned as a gift bestowed by benevolent teachers on ignorant "illiterates" in need of salvation. Indeed, Freire's account of literacy as a "pedagogy of the oppressed" replaces the kind of authoritarianism evidenced in neo-imperial and colonial approaches to literacy, and reproduced in Nussbaum's capabilities approach and third-wave feminism, with a dialogic model of education grounded in the epistemic agency of the oppressed. This model takes as its departure point the process of learning *with* and *from* those deemed "illiterate." Freire therefore shows that literacies of decolonization, if they are to be genuinely liberatory, must begin by undoing the division between literate and illiterate, teacher and student, knowledge and ignorance, rescuer and rescued.

Since the publication of Said's (1978) *Orientalism*, and the subsequent growth of postcolonial discourse analysis as an academic field, much scholarship on colonialism has either ignored the critical traditions of social and political thought that emerged within anti-colonial movements or condemned what some postcolonial scholars claim are the simplistic and essentialist revolutionary-liberationist narratives of decolonization they advance (Parry 2004). The postcolonial scholar David Scott (2004) sums up this postcolonial critique when he suggests that anti-colonial theories are modelled on the narrative form of the romance. For Scott, anti-colonial thought presents the transition from colonialism to postcolonialism as a journey of "overcoming" and "vindication," of "salvation and redemption" (8). Within such accounts, the colonized overthrow the colonial regime; in so doing, they either return to a pre-colonial traditional life or emerge as new modern subjects liberated from the traumatic legacies of colonialism and imperialism (Parry 2004).

For postcolonial critics like Scott, anti-colonial narratives, such as the one produced within Freire's corpus, offer utopic visions of decolonization that miss the extent to which anti-colonial struggles often gave way to authoritarian and corrupt regimes, and reproduced essentialist notions of nation, race, and history.[109] Postcolonial critics rightly highlight the failure of many postcolonial states to make good on the promise of liberation that guided anti-colonial struggles. I hope to show, however, that this critique is not wholly applicable to Freire's work. Indeed, while some anti-colonial thinkers have urged a return to pre-colonial indigenous traditions or offered visions of a new postcolonial subject freed of all past inequalities, Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed breaks with these visions of decolonization. I read Freire's philosophy of education as a critical project of modernity that challenges not only what Benita Parry (2004) calls "colonial social institutions" (such as education) and calls "archaic indigenous forms" (9), but also the tendency for liberatory struggles to become vanguardist and to reproduce the unequal relations between the "literate" and the "illiterate" that his project of critical literacy aims to transform. Indeed, at the same time as Freire's work reimagines literacy as a freedom-enhancing practice in which the student becomes the educator and the educator the student, he also redefines decolonization itself as a pedagogical process of self and social transformation – as the formation of new desires, political subjectivities, and collective practices of self-determination – for which literacy provides the model.

However, while this chapter seeks to recover the insights that Freire's radical reimagining of literacy as mode of decolonization might offer the feminist project of

[109] See also Scott's (1999) earlier critique of the anti-colonial project.

decolonizing literacies, it does not promote an uncritical revival of Freire's approach. Although I depart from those postcolonial scholars who portray all anti-colonial thought as offering romantic narratives of decolonization, I also disagree with those anti-colonial scholars, such as Benita Parry (2004), who seek to shield from critique those "modes of writing resistance which do not conform to contemporary theoretical rules of discursive racialism" (43). I suggest that any attempt to elaborate a feminist approach to decolonizing literacies must grapple not only with Freire's promises but also with the failure of anti-colonial struggles, and the projects of critical literacy developed therein, to adequately move beyond the logic of coloniality – and its "overrepresentation" of the white bourgeois definition of "Man" as the normative conception of the human in relation to which all others are deemed not fully human or inhuman (Wynter 2003, 260).

Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed is inspired by a form of Marxist humanism that advances an andro-centric and anthro-pocentric understanding of freedom. I shall show that Freire's theory of liberatory education is premised on a dualistic model of oppressor/oppressed that ignores gender and sexual oppression and therefore offers an incomplete vision of decolonization that fails to address the heteropatriarchy of the colonial/modern sex/gender system. As a consequence, Freire's approach to critical literacy does not fully account for the complex nature not only of how oppression operates, but also of multiple forms of resistance to it. His work also equates freedom with overcoming the animal-like status of the oppressed. For Freire, critical literacy provides the means of transforming the oppressed from animal to human. However, while Freire seeks to challenge the dehumanization of the oppressed, he never questions the

very human/animal division that undergirds the coloniality of literacy. Consequently, he ends up advancing an anthropocentric concept of freedom that bolsters the logic of domination he seeks to challenge and that does not sufficiently link human liberation to the liberation of other-than-human animals.

These limitations of Freire's work are significant. However, rather than abandon his vision of literacy, I believe that feminists instead would be well advised to make an exploration of these failures a starting point for rethinking his project of decolonizing literacies as an "utopian pedagogy" for the present-day (Freire 1985, 57). Indeed, while postcolonial critics deride the kind of utopic vision Freire advances as a naïve romanticism, I follow the queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz (2009) who proposes (in a different context) that the utopias articulated in the cultural projects of past social movements offer models for moving beyond the political pessimism that characterizes some post-structuralist-inspired critique. Rather than approach these utopias as templates for future struggles, Muñoz suggests that contemporary critics should view them instead as "modes of being and feeling" that anticipate what could be but is not-yet (9). Despite its shortcomings, Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed advances a vision of the future predicated on egalitarian and democratic social relations. As I shall show, this utopic vision is not escapist or idealist, but is instead an "historical commitment" that is located in, and emerges from, a critique of the existing state of oppression (Freire 1985, 57; McLaren and Giroux 1997). Far from offering a blueprint for the future, Freire's work instead serves as an important reminder of the centrality of the imagination to decolonizing projects, since these projects call for the envisioning of alternative social

relations that have yet to be lived (Mohanty 2003; Alexander 2005). In what follows, I therefore read Freire as offering a prophetic, hopeful, and utopian approach to decolonizing literacies, the promises and failures of which represent the "still unrealized potential" of anti-colonial struggles and provide an opening for imagining a future not beholden to the logic of coloniality (Muñoz 2009, 27).

I. Freire's Critique of Banking Education

Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the most influential of his texts, consists of a series of reflections on the possibilities for developing a form of literacy education, grounded in the experiences of the oppressed and those classified as "illiterate," which could serve as a "motivating force for liberating action" to "transform the concrete situation that begets oppression" (48, 49). Written while he was living in exile in Chile, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is informed by his work as a literacy educator for the rural and urban poor and as the director of Brazil's National Literacy Program at a time when "illiterates" did not have the franchise (Mayo 1999; Kirkendall 2010; Schugurensky 2011). The goal of Freire's literacy campaigns was to teach adults to read and write not only the word, but also the world, and to thereby promote a critical consciousness (or *conscientization*) of their socio-historic situation (Macedo and Freire 1997; Mayo 1999). Due to the success of his adult literacy campaigns in politicizing peasants and the urban poor, and enabling them to vote, Freire was forced into exile in 1964 after a multi-national backed military coup ousted Joao Goulart (Brazil's left-leaning populist president) (Mayo 2005; Kirkendall 2010; Schugurensky 2011).

Pedagogy of the Oppressed begins with a meditation on the psychic and material violence inflicted on oppressed peoples by the conditions of oppression, which deny them the status of subjects and transform them into objects controlled and dominated by their oppressors. Defining oppression as "any situation in which 'A' objectively exploits 'B' or hinders his or her pursuit of self-affirmation" (55), Freire portrays the oppressive situation as a dualistic order that divides the oppressor and the oppressed into two mutually exclusive social groups, and "engenders an entire way of life and behaviour" for each (57). Freire's diagnosis of the oppositional logic that constitutes the oppressor/oppressed relation echoes both Albert Memmi's and Frantz Fanon's critiques of the Manichaeism of the colonial order that divides the world into two "compartments…inhabited by different species": the settler and the native (Fanon 1965, 30). Memmi (1967), for instance, argues that the colonizer's profit and privilege requires and produces the colonized's misery and subhuman condition, while Fanon (1963, 1965) suggests that the setter can claim the category of the human exclusively for the European only by excluding the native from it and consigning the native to the status of an animal. Freire similarly proposes that the oppressor's wealth and privilege requires not only that the oppressed live in animal-like conditions. More significant for Freire (2000) is that such conditions transform the oppressed from "beings for themselves" into objects for others, a process that he calls "dehumanization" (97, 44).

For Freire, any pedagogy of the oppressed needs to start here: with how this historical condition of objectification and dehumanization shapes the consciousness of the oppressor and the oppressed, or as Marx put it how "consciousness is [determined] by

life" (Marx 1978d, 155). What Freire calls the "oppressor consciousness" transforms "everything surrounding it into an object of its domination. The earth, property, production, the creations of people, peoples themselves, time – everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal" (58). For Freire, such domination is possible only when the oppressed are stripped of their humanity, reduced to the status of animals, and related to solely as inanimate, non-human instruments of the oppressor's control. Following Eric Fromm, Freire thus suggests that "oppressor consciousness" is "necrophilic" and is characterized by a sadistic desire for domination and love of death (59). In contrast, the "oppressed consciousness" is bifurcated: the oppressed simultaneously are aware of their desire for freedom *and* have internalized the oppressor's image of them as inferior beings who cannot act on the world (see also Arnowitz 2015). Yet, Freire argues that despite this contradictory character of the "oppressed consciousness," "so often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything – that they are sick, lazy and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness" (45). Alienated from their experiences, the oppressed thus develop what Freire calls a "fear of freedom" and ultimately come to accept their oppression (47; see also Roberts 2000; Arnowitz 2015). For Freire, this divided consciousness constitutes the "tragic dilemma of the oppressed" (48). But it equally "rots" the oppressors, as Memmi (1967, xvii) put it: the oppressors' necrophilia prevents the possibility of ethical relations with others and thus turns them against their own humanity.

According to Freire, one of the most troubling outcomes and manifestations of this condition of mutual dehumanization is the distortion of communicative relations under oppressive conditions – a distortion that also undergirds the neo-imperial, colonial, and international feminist approaches to literacy outlined in Part One. Freire argues that human beings are "essentially communicative creatures" and that they experience their humanity primarily in "communion" with each other (128) – an encounter characterized by love, trust, cooperation, and solidarity (Schutte 1993; Schugurensky 2011). The Manichaeism of the colonial situation, however, breaks this communion: it grants only the oppressors the power of communicative action; the oppressed are transformed into silent spectators of the oppressor's action. "Castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world," they are reduced to the status of animals who accept their immediate situation (Freire 2000, 49).

This attention to the alienated and alienating communicative relations of the colonial situation resonates with Fanon's anti-colonial thought. Fanon (1965) was equally concerned with how the imposition of the colonizer's language on the colonized as the only means of communication results in the annihilation of the possibility for ethical communicative relations between colonizer and colonized (Seyki-Otu 2009). As Fanon notes in *A Dying Colonialism*, the dominance of the colonizer's language leads not only to the loss of indigenous languages. More concerning for him is that the communicative relations established by this linguistic dominance ensure that the occupier's voice is presented "as the only one" (95), as the only authoritative one, and that "the language of the occupier" is accorded "the role of *Logos*" (91): it serves both as the "rational"

ordering principle or "truth" of the colonial society and as the sole means of accessing this truth (76). Such unequal relations of communicative interaction thereby dispossess the native of the status of the speaking subject, deny the native access to the realm of signification, and thus exclude the native from the realm of truth- and meaning-making (Seyki-Otu 2009). Following Fanon, Freire's concern is with the ways in which what Fanon calls "the monologue of the colonial situation" (95) impedes communication, the result of which "is to reduce men to the status of 'things'" (Freire 2000, 128). Yet while Fanon took the French language as his departure point for a critique of the communicative antinomies of colonialism, Freire was less concerned (at least in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) with the neo-colonial dominance of a foreign language than with how such unequal communicative relations structure and are reflected in the pedagogical encounter between educator and student.

Freire argues that the dominant educational model under capitalism, which he famously called "banking education," is predicated on a hierarchical relation between the educator and the educated (72). In this model, the teacher is viewed as the subject of knowledge while the students are its object: they are "receptacles" into which the teacher "deposits" knowledge (72). Freire suggests that, far from being a neutral educational method, "banking education" is instead a political system that reproduces the division between intellectual and manual labour that Marx (1978d) showed is the defining feature of class societies (Mayo 1999). As Marx suggests, only when class division emerges does it becomes possible for certain segments of the population to live off the surplus produced by others and thus to engage in forms of mental labour that are separate from

manual labour. Moreover, for Marx, the ruling class controls not only the means of material production but also the means of intellectual production and thus rules as thinkers by producing the knowledge to which those lacking access to the means of mental production are subjected. Following Marx, Freire (2000) argues that implicit in the banking model of education are particular concepts of knowledge and communication that deprive the educated of their status of agents of learning. In this model, knowledge is not approached as the product of collective inquiry, but instead as a set of abstract facts that are treated as "a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves to be knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (72). This division between knower and known, knowledge and ignorance, renders communication between teacher and student impossible: rather than "communicate, the teacher issues communiqués" to the student who, as a passive consumer, must memorize and repeat the teacher's information without critical comprehension (75).

In *Education for Critical Consciousness* (1973) and *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation* (1985), Freire explores in more detail how this banking model underwrites the adult literacy programming offered to peasants and the rural poor in the global south. Freire (1973, 1985) argues that the primers used as basic texts in literacy programs throughout Latin America reduce literacy to a set of technical reading and writing skills, which can be imparted through mechanical and routine techniques regardless of socio-historical context. Freire traces the origins of this form of basic literacy education to the colonial ideology that I outlined in the previous three chapters of this study: an ideology that views "illiteracy" as sentencing persons who cannot read or

write to a life of ignorance and debilitation, and literacy as a gift that will cure "illiterates" of their disease (both psychic and economic) (see also Roberts 2000). Freire (1985) proposes, however, that far from offering a cure for the "culture of silence" to which the oppressed are assigned, this view of literacy as panacea instead reproduces the very power relations that "deprive men of the right to speak up, not only illiterates but all those who are treated as objects in a dependent relationship" (9, 48).

In this "nutritionist" model of literacy, the teachers select the words with which to "fill" up the "undernourished" illiterate (45). Uprooted from the socio-historic context in which their meaning is produced, and "deprived of their character as linguistic signs constitutive of man's thought-language, words are transformed into mere 'deposits of vocabulary'" (45). The words that the student encounters in literacy education thus become "alienating and alienated" (46). However, the cause of this alienation for Freire is not solely that the words presented in the literacy curriculum are divorced from the students' socio-cultural reality. Rather, following the early Marx (1978b) of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Freire (2000) suggests that this alienation is first-and-foremost a product of the alienating relations of their production. Such relations negate the presence of students as active subjects and users of language; they instead turn them into passive recipients of the teacher's "idle chatter" and objects to be managed by the education system (87; Roberts 2000; Klerk 2009). In so doing, they alienate students from their own "creative effort" and decision-making powers (Freire 1985, 45). Moreover, to the extent that students are separated from their own creativity, they learn to confront both the word and the world, not as the products of their linguistic and historical

activity, but as "motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable" entities, pre-determined by fatalistic laws that are ultimately unchangeable (Freire 2000, 71). For Freire, the literacy process "reinforces the mythification of reality by keeping it opaque" and thereby ensures that the oppressed "cannot perceive clearly the 'order' which serves the interests of the oppressors" (62). Freire thus demonstrates that the approach to literacy as a set of technical skills (what I have referred to, following Street [2011], in this study as the "autonomous model" [581]) serves not to liberate the "illiterate" – as neo-imperial, colonial, and international feminist projects claim – but to instead transform them into passive spectators of the world. This approach to literacy, Freire reveals, thus represents another form of "illiteracy" that provides a justification for existing relations of oppression.

II. Freire and Lukács on Reification

Freire's critique of banking education as a form of authoritarianism that turns both students and the world into inanimate objects bears the traces not only of the early Marx's theory of alienated labour but also of Georg Lukács's (2000) reification thesis and his account of how this alienating logic shapes all aspects of life under capitalism. While much scholarly attention has been devoted to Freire's debt to Marx, Gramsci, Memmi, and Fanon, comparatively less has been paid to the influence of Lukács's reification thesis on Freire's thought.[110] Yet, the parallels between Freire and Lukács need to be traced, not solely because Lukács's theory of the reification of the proletariat's consciousness figures centrally in Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* but also because,

[110] The few exceptions include Taylor (1993); Morrow and Torres (2002); Lewis (2007); and Arnowitz (2015).

despite Freire's use of Lukács's concept of thingification, Freire's interpretation of the "oppressed consciousness" led him to different conclusions about the possibilities for the development a revolutionary subjectivity than Lukács. Freire's contribution to the history of Western Marxism therefore can be best located in his engagement with Lukács.

That Freire drew heavily from Lukács notion of reification is not surprising given that Lukács's (2000) essay "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" played a central role in the social theory of the middle fifty-years of the twentieth century. Challenging the economic determinism and pseudo-scientism that characterized the Marxism of the Second International, Lukács is widely heralded for having exposed the philosophical critique of the formal rationality of bourgeois society latent in Marx's account of commodity fetishism, and hence the correspondence between Marx's economic analysis and his critique of bourgeois culture. Lukács bases much of his discussion of reification on that part of Marx's (1990) account of commodity fetishism that emphasizes the thingification of human relations and the alienation and objectification of labour in a society governed by relations of commodity exchange (Rose 2014). In fact, Lukács's notion of reification generally refers to the attribution of a thing-like status to changing and complex social relationships. It thus recalls Marx's insight into how relations of commodity exchange transform a fundamentally social relation – the exchange of labour-power – into a relation between things – commodities and money. Lukács's theory of reification expands upon Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism in order to show how the relation of commodity exchange serves as the universal structuring principle, not just of the market economy, but of capitalist culture and society as well. In

particular, Lukács (2000) claims that it is the exchange of labour-power as a commodity – the exchange of equal and comparable labour abstracted from its useful and concrete forms – that ultimately shapes "the objective forms of bourgeois society together with the subjective forms corresponding to them" (83).

For Lukács, then, "the fate of the worker" as commodity is "the fate of society as a whole" (92). Lukács argues that, due to the reification of the labour process under capitalism, the productive system confronts the worker as an objective and independent world which controls and regulates the worker's labour and personality by virtue of an alien agency. The more advanced the mechanization, specialization, and rationalization of the work process becomes, the more the expenditure of labour-power appears to workers as the function of rationally calculable systems and not as the activity of actual people. Work becomes literally reified; it becomes a thing and takes on the semblance of a fixed and established reality, what Lukács refers to as "second nature" (86). According to Lukács, this reification of the work process gives rise to subjective reification, to the reification of the worker's consciousness and personality. With the rationalization of the productive system, workers become a mechanical part of a mechanical process; they are no longer active participants in the labour process but are instead cogs in a rationally-calculable system. Forced to abdicate their qualitative, human, and individual attributes when they enter the factory, workers face their own labour as something opposed to their total personality. The progressive objectification of labour in the commodity thus transforms the worker as subject into a passive spectator of the production process.

For Lukács, this split between objectivity and subjectivity – between an independently-existing object world and a subject who can respond to the object world only with "passive contemplation" – is not confined to the work process under capitalism (66). It is instead the origin of the "irrational" rationality of bourgeois culture as a whole: a system of social thought and organization that is unable to grasp the concrete substratum of its own formal categories and structures (118). Drawing on Hegel's category of appearance, Lukács argues that under capitalism, everyday practice and consciousness are reified and enmeshed in the world of appearances; people are therefore unable to transcend the immediacy of the commodity, and thus are incapable of perceiving the social relations that lie hidden in it. Lukács describes this reified or fetishized experience as a "veil" that cloaks the essence of capitalist society (86). Lukács proposes that this veil, which hides from consciousness its own practical knowledge, becomes increasingly difficult to "penetrate" as the logic of commodification sinks deeper into the human psyche (105). Hence, for Lukács everyday experience gives rise to false consciousness: a consciousness unable to perceive the socio-historical processes that shape one's life and which one shapes through productive activity.

Freire's account of banking education parallels Lukács's theory of reification as a "veil" that distorts the real. As we have seen, Freire offers a portrait of banking education that has much in common with Lukács's theory of how the progressive rationalization of bourgeois culture turns subjects into objects who confront the world that is of their own making as "second nature" and who are thus unable to perceive the origins of their oppression. Moreover, both Lukács and Freire suggest that the task of the historical

materialist is to de-reify the world, unveil appearance, and demystify the immediate. For both, de-reification involves denaturalizing the social through a materialist dialectics that takes as its departure point the historical mediation of subject and object, theory and practice, consciousness and action. Materialist dialectics, as a mode of consciousness-raising, uncovers history as a concrete totality and identifies the constitutive mediations of capitalism, which reified consciousness perceives only as isolated instances or facts (Lukács 2000). As Freire (2000) put it, through *conscientização* (consciousness-raising), the oppressed overcome their false perception of reality by developing "their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation" (83). Both Lukács and Freire also argue that in order for this method of materialist dialectics to become revolutionary, the subject of history has to make this totalizing perspective its own. For Lukács, this subject of history is the proletariat. Only the proletariat's consciousness of itself as commodity is simultaneously the objective knowledge of the totality of bourgeois social thought and organization. And only the proletariat's awareness of its own commodification will compel it to realize itself in the historical process, and to thereby also practically realize Marxist dialectics, by overcoming the reification of capitalist rationality through the socialist transformation of society. Similarly, Freire argues that revolutionary transformation is the project of the oppressed, whose experience of dehumanization will lead them to struggle against their oppressors. Freire argues that, through this struggle, the oppressed liberate both themselves and their oppressors from the conditions of domination.

The primary difference between Freire and Lukács, however, is most visible in how they solve the problem of the origins of this revolutionary consciousness amongst the oppressed. If the reification of the worker's consciousness is as complete as Lukács proposes, and if banking education so thoroughly indoctrinates the oppressed into the ideology that condones their own oppression as Freire infers, whence does the critical self-awareness necessary for revolutionary transformation emerge? While throughout his reification essay Lukács argues that socialist transformation can occur only through the free action of the proletariat, his theory of reification as false consciousness ultimately leads him to transfer the project of revolution from everyday workers to the vanguard party of the working class. The vanguard's job is to penetrate the illusions of experience and to assist the proletariat in gaining "true" knowledge of their class position and interests by "making them conscious of the true basis of their hitherto unconscious actions, vague ideology and confused feelings" (Lukács 1971, 35).[111] For him, the political education of the proletariat therefore involves a project of transforming ignorance into knowledge that can only be undertaken by the leadership of the revolutionary party.

The Freirean scholar Tyron Lewis (2007) proposes that Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed represents a continuation and further development of Lukács's theory of revolutionary leadership. For him, it provides the "pedagogical techniques necessitated by, yet lacking in, [Lukács's] theory of the vanguard" (289). Put differently, Lewis suggests that Freire addresses the question of communication between revolutionary

[111] See Lukács (1971).

leaders and the working class – a question that informs, yet remains "unconscious," in Lukács's work (291). Lewis is correct to highlight Freire's indebtedness to and engagement with Lukács. Yet, in his attempt to read Freire as offering a symptomatic reading of Lukács that uncovers a theory of dialogic pedagogy implicit in Lukács's theory of the vanguard, Lewis downplays Freire's explicit critique of the kind of political education advanced by Lukács. In the final chapter of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, for instance, Freire (2000) argues that such vanguardism merely repeats the monologic educational model of the oppressor and the myth of the absolute ignorance of the oppressed on which it is based (133). As Freire notes, when the banking method of education is used by the revolutionary leadership in relation to the oppressed who they portray as in need of liberating, the vanguardist party treats the oppressed as objects in need of saving; the leadership is defined as having exclusive access to the "true" knowledge of the historic situation, while the oppressed are portrayed as ignorants who need to be changed from above. As a consequence, for Freire, vanguardism reproduces rather than transforms the hierarchical social relations between teacher and student underpinning the banking model.

Hence, rather than read Freire as a continuation of Lukács's theory of revolutionary leadership, I suggest that Freire instead breaks with Lukács's model of vanguardism. As a counterpoint to Lukács's theory of the vanguard, which turns the oppressed into the instrument of party dogma and leadership, Freire instead proposes a theory of political education that draws from Marx's famous critique of Feuerbach's mechanistic materialism. As Marx (1978e) put it, "the materialist doctrine that men are a

product of circumstances and that therefore changed men are the product of other circumstances and changed upbringing forgets that it is men that change circumstances and that the educator himself needs educating" (144). Drawing from Marx, Freire (2000) proposes, in contrast to Lukács, that a pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be given as a gift by revolutionary leaders who know best. Rather it must be "forged *with*, not *for*, the oppressed...in struggle" (48). A pedagogy of the oppressed must therefore foreground the agency of the oppressed and their role in their own liberation. It thus must begin by transforming the teacher/student relationship: the teacher must "exchange the role of depositor, prescriber, domesticator, for the role of the student among students" (75). This transformation of the teacher/student relation therefore also requires undoing the dichotomy between knowledge and ignorance that undergirds both banking education and vanguardist politics. It must begin with the contradictory consciousness of the oppressed – with the inability of ideology to completely cancel practical knowledge or the knowledge gained through experience (48; Smith 1990). Indeed, if the teacher is to be a student among students, the students also must be approached as agents of knowledge production, not as ignorant and passive vessels of the teacher's knowledge or the revolutionary party's demands. Hence, while Freire (2000) agrees with Lukács that the pedagogy of the oppressed must "clarify and illuminate" the world, he is careful to note that "no one can unveil the world for another" (169); rather, "the lesson…must come from the oppressed themselves" (45).

The primacy that Freire grants to the self-emancipation of the oppressed distinguishes his pedagogy of the oppressed not only from Lukács's theory of political

education, but also from Nussbaum's capabilities approach to literacy. Both Nussbaum and Freire start from the premise that oppression results in dehumanization because it reduces people to an animal-like status, prevents them from developing their creative potential, and thus alienates them from their capacities by treating them as beings for others. However, as I briefly alluded to in Chapter Three, Nussbaum never addresses the problem of *how* people develop their capacities (Quillen 2001-2002; Lebowitz 2007). Nussbaum's liberal reformism advocates removing traditional barriers to women's equality and providing women with equal access to literacy. But she follows in the tradition of the "false generosity" that Freire (2000, 44) ascribes to humanitarianism by treating literacy as a gift bestowed by the teacher on "illiterate" women, and holding that this gift will enable women's political and economic empowerment, which she defines as women's entry into the existing structures of power. One problem with this approach is that it equates oppression with marginalization from power, and thus obfuscates the extent to which the existing structures of power are themselves the causes of oppression. As Freire (1985) argues, the task of liberatory education is not to integrate the oppressed into the existing political and economic system. Rather, it is to transform the existing system that is itself the cause of their oppression. Another problem is that it replicates the banking model of education and thus maintains injustice: in both Nussbaum's humanitarianism and the banking model the oppressed are spoken to, but not approached as speaking subjects. As Freire suggests, the educator should not approach his or her task as changing circumstances for people and thereby changing their consciousness. Following Marx's understanding of the mutual constitution of the self and the world (that

people make the world and are made by it), Freire argues that this transformation of the self and the social – what Marx (1978e) calls "the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity" (144) – can occur only through revolutionary practice in which "the people subjected to domination must fight for their own emancipation" (Freire 2000, 86). In other words, Freire proposes *contra* Nussbaum that people develop their capacities and realize their potential only when they are active participants in a democratic struggle to end oppression (Lebowitz 2007).

III. Critical Literacy as Dialogic, Problem-Posing Education

Freire's commitment to revolutionary practice as the key to self and social transformation prompted him to develop a new approach to literacy – what he calls "critical literacy" (Freire and Macedo 1987, 10). Critical literacy challenges the banking model of literacy and instead highlights the transformative potential of literacy education. In contrast to the dominant conception of literacy as a set of dehistoricized and technical decoding and writing skills, Freire re-envisions literacy as a method of reading and writing the word and the world politically: that is, as an activity of critically analyzing those relations of power and domination that structure people's lives in unequal and hierarchal ways. Freire argues that critical literacy must take as its departure point teaching those deemed functionally "illiterate" to read and write the word since literacy is used to disenfranchise the poor (Macedo and Freire 1987; Mayo 1999). However, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire (2000) claims that if the oppressed learn only to read the word and not the world, they may become functionally literate but will remain objects that are known and acted upon (see also Macedo and Freire 1997). In order to transform what Fanon (1963) refers

to as "spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors" (36), critical literacy, in Freire's view, must involve a pedagogical process that enables the oppressed to interpret the causes of their oppression as the social and historical productions that they are, and thus as the targets of transformative action.

Moreover, Freire argues that, if this process of transformation is to be grounded in the self-directed activity of the oppressed, critical literacy must emerge from dialogue with the oppressed. Freire developed what he called "problem-posing education" as a remedy to the banking method (79). In contrast to the banking model, problem-posing education encourages teachers and students to approach the object of knowledge – which Freire defines as "oppression and its causes" – as a problem that only can be reflected on, known, and transformed through dialogue (48). For Freire, this dialogic interaction is not a mere pedagogical technique. Rather it is a way of highlighting the intersubjective and thus social nature of knowledge production occluded by the dominant banking model. It is through this dialogical, problem-posing approach to education, Freire argues, that the teacher/student contradiction is practically resolved: through dialogue about oppression and its causes "the teacher is no longer merely the one who teaches, but the one who in himself taught in dialogue with the student, who in turn while being taught also teach" (80).

This is not to suggest that Freire advocated annihilating the teacher's role. Indeed, while Freire proposes that the teacher/student contradiction is overcome through dialogical interaction, it is noteworthy that he continues to use the terms "teacher" and "student" throughout his discussion of problem-posing education. Yet, while Freire

frequently appeals to the traditional distinction between teacher and student, these social roles are radically transformed in Freirean pedagogy and philosophy of education. He argues that the role of the educator is always "directive" – the educator comes to the group with specific goals (Macedo and Freire 1987, 139). Yet, while the authoritarian model of banking education reinforces the teacher's expertise, control, and individual genius, the goal of problem-posing education is to "help learners get involved in planning education, help them develop the critical capacity to consider and participate in the direction of their education" (139; Mayo 1999). In other words, the goal of the liberatory educator is not solely to change the content of education – to focus on oppression and its causes. It is also to socialize the means of intellectual production – to turn students into collaborators and producers of knowledge. This practice of liberatory education thus requires constant reflection on the role of the teacher, who must remain vigilant against falling for the romance of the teacher's expertise.

The pedagogical task of critical literacy educators therefore is to foster the development of the organizing and directive capacities of oppressed people that have been repressed by the colonial legacies of literacy. Freire (1985) argues that such a task requires that critical literacy education start with students' "linguistic universe" (91). Literacy programming for the rural and urban poor therefore must be rooted in the idiom of each community, and develop in a process of democratic engagement with community members (Freire 2000; Roberts 2000; Schugurensky 2011).

In the Freirean method of literacy education, a team of popular educators or coordinators visit villages and, with the active participation of community members as

co-investigators, collect a list of what Freire (1985) calls "generative words" (56): words that reflect the linguistic and thematic universe of the community.[112] The educators then create what Freire calls "codifications" of the word – typically in the form of visual images (sketches or photographs) – that embody the "limit-situations" or social contradictions that community members can recognize (Freire 2000, 113). In popular culture circles composed of educators and community members, participants collectively decode the themes represented in the codification, submitting the codification to critical analysis in dialogue with one another (Freire 1985). Freire (1985) describes this method of codification as follows:

> codification represents a given dimension of reality as individuals live in it, and this dimension is proposed for their analysis in a context other than that in which they live it. Codification thus transforms what was a way of life in the real context into 'objectum' in the theoretical context. The learners, rather than receive information about this or that fact, analyze aspects of their own existential experiences represented in the codification (52).

As JanMohamed (1994) explains, at the outset of the meeting, the codification appears natural to the participants. However, through the process of decodification – which involves "breaking down the codified totality and putting it together again" – the participants start to see the historically-constituted nature of the "knowledge object" and thus of their own reality (Freire 1985, 91). Only after this critical analysis of the

[112] See Roberts (2000) and Schugurensky (2011) for a comprehensive account of this method.

codification does the educator begin to establish the semantic relation between the generative word and its referent. The word is then separated into its syllables, which the students learn to recombine into different words.

In this technique, reading and writing "the world" occurs before learning to read and write "the word"; however, learning the word ultimately leads to the study of other "generative words and themes" – to new ways of critically reading and writing the world (Macedo and Freire 1987, 23, 43). As Michele Grossman (2013) points out, Freire's method therefore deconstructs the literacy/orality binary that undergirds sociolinguistic and anthropological theories of the Great Divide, such as those discussed in Chapter Two. For Freire, reading and writing the world, while a form of "literacy," does not require the ability to read and write the word. In the culture circles, educators and students begin with dialogue – with oral communication – and this dialogue leads to lessons in technical literacy – or to the formal acquisition of reading and writing skills. Yet, technical literacy does not, according to Freire, automatically result in "critical literacy," which necessitates that "readings of the word" lead to "new and proliferating" "readings of the world," readings that develop in dialogue with others (Grossman 2013, 296).

For Freire, as JanMohamed (1994) notes, this process of teaching literacy is "isomorphic" with ideology critique and the de-mythification of the world (242). The method of codification and decodification allows students to see both linguistic and social structures as composed of elements that can be broken down into their constitutive elements and reassembled. Put differently, they come to see the word and the world as

something over which they have control. This mode of reading and writing the word and the world thus re-asserts the epistemic and political agency of oppressed peoples denied by banking education.

In revealing the historically-constituted and socially-mediated nature of language and the world, critical literacy as a problem-posing education thus represents a way of keeping experience and history open to the possibility of transformation. As Freire (2000) notes, problem-posing education turns the present situation into a problem in need of inquiry; and, in so doing, it "affirms men and women as beings in the process of *becoming* – as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality" (*emphasis in original*, 84). Yet, Freire was always mindful that decolonizing the imagination – or as Fanon (1963) put it, letting loose the imagination "outside the bounds of the colonial order" (68) – cannot occur through critical reflection alone. It must lead to political practice. The goal of critical literacy, according to Freire, should be to enable people to collectively transform the historical situation that creates the oppressive conditions that are the objects of pedagogical inquiry. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (2000) therefore offers an interpretation of literacy as a political project of reading and writing the word and the world, the ultimate aim of which is "liberating praxis" (Mayo 2005).

IV. Literacy as Decolonization/Decolonization as Literacy

Indeed, Freire viewed his proposals for critical literacy education as contributions to movements for popular sovereignty and decolonization in Latin America and Africa (Mayo 1999). Within Freire's (2000) writings on decolonization and revolutionary

struggle, literacy assumes a double role. On the one hand, as a critical practice of ideology critique, literacy is envisioned as central to producing the "new being" that is the goal of decolonization: a "new man" who is "no longer oppressor or oppressed, but human in the process of achieving freedom" (49; McClaren 2000). Freire recognized that the creation of this new being does not automatically emerge from declarations of formal political sovereignty and national independence; it rather necessitates people's "democratic participation in the reinvention of their society" (Macedo and Freire 1987, 65; Mohanty 2004). Projects of critical literacy therefore must offer oppressed peoples the opportunity to become "authors" of their lives in more than one sense: to become authors not of their own knowledge, but also of the organization of their communities (12).[113] Hence, while in his later work Freire (1987) argues that critical literacy education should be rooted in indigenous languages and not the colonizer's language, he never advocated a complete rejection of modernity. Rather, he argues that both traditional languages and the "impositions of colonial modernity" (such as literacy) are radically transformed and reinvented as they are used in struggles for decolonization.[114]

On the other hand, Freire suggests that critical literacy is not only a constitutive element of struggles for decolonization; it also provides the model for decolonization itself. Freire argues that decolonization, if it is to be freedom-enhancing and enable the self-emancipation of the oppressed, must be grounded in the democratic relations of intellectual production that characterize critical literacy education. As I suggested above,

[113] Peter McClaren (2007) makes a similar point.
[114] I borrow the phrase "impositions of colonial modernity" from Seyki-Otu (2009), who explores Fanon's similar approach to communication technologies (185).

Freire argues that, just as a "pedagogy of the oppressed" must be forged with the oppressed and not imposed from above, revolutionary action must be rooted in dialogue (McLaren 2000; Torres and Morrow 2002). As Freire (2000) writes: "political action on the side of the oppressed must be pedagogical action in the authentic sense of the word, and, therefore, action *with* the oppressed" (*emphasis in original*, 66). Freire emphasizes this pedagogical dimension of revolutionary struggle for two reasons. First, he seeks to show that any liberation struggle that grants power only to the revolutionary leadership functions as a counter-revolutionary force because it turns a segment of the oppressed into new oppressors who rule and govern from above (58). For Freire, revolutionary struggle is fundamentally a pedagogical process because it enables those reduced to the "status of *objects* to assume the status of historical *Subjects*" (160); it thus must be premised on a model of cooperation, mutuality, and reciprocity in which Subjects encounter each other as "beings for themselves," as "co-Subjects" or equal participants in democratic struggle (169; Morrow and Torres 2002; Bhattacharya 2011). Emphasizing the centrality of unity and cooperation between leaders and the "the people" to revolutionary struggle, Freire references Martin Buber's conception of the I-Thou relation as an example of what such a dialogic, intersubjective relation between Subjects might entail (Morrow and Torres 2002). Second, and perhaps more importantly, the pedagogical character of the revolution highlights its incompleteness. It reveals that revolutionary struggle is ongoing, unfinished, and must involve constant self-critique and reflection both on the historic conditions to which it is a response and its complicity with

the very logic of domination it seeks to transform (McClaren 2000).[115] Revolutionary action is not a series of "prescriptions" to be followed (Freire 1985, 163). It is instead made and remade as people transform themselves and the world. For Freire, revolution as educative entails an openness to a future that cannot be determined in advance. It therefore is prophetic, hopeful, and utopian: it points to what could be but is not yet (Giroux and McLaren 1997; Arnowitz 2015).

Freire (1985) saw his pedagogy of the oppressed and revolutionary struggle as akin to, and as central features of, what he calls the "prophetic church" (139). In his work on the Christian church, Freire distinguishes the "prophetic church" from both the "fatalism" espoused by the traditional church (which preaches acceptance of worldly suffering in the name of salvation in the afterlife) and the "do-goodism" of the modern church (which advocates reform but not radical transformative action) (135; Null 2011). Freire proposes that the prophetic church is instead "the church of hope, hope which only exists in the future, a future which only the oppressed classes have, as the future of the dominant classes is a pure repetition of their present state of being the oppressors" (Freire in Gadotti 1994, 4).

To understand what Freire means by "prophetic," and why he saw critical literacy and revolution as part-and-parcel of the "prophetic church," it is necessary to briefly outline Freire's relationship to Latin American liberation theology, which was formed in response both to widespread poverty in Latin America and to the modernizing program of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). The principles of liberation theology were first

[115] Fanon (1963, 1965) offers a similar vision of decolonization as requiring a self-reflexive and open-ended critical practice. See Taylor (1989, 1992).

developed at a meeting of Latin American bishops in Medellin, Columbia, in 1968. Influenced by Freire's practice of radical adult education, the bishops called for a theology committed to ending oppression and to grassroots political transformation (Kirkendall 2010; Slessarves-Jamir 2011). The role of the church, according to Peruvian scholar and Dominican priest Gustavo Gutierrez (1973) (a founder of liberation theology), is to continue the prophetic tradition of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament (Slessarves-Jamir 2011):

> the God whom we know in the Bible is a liberating God, a God who destroys myths and alienations, a God who intervenes in history in order to break down the structures of injustice and who raises up prophets in order to point out the way of justice and mercy. He is the God who liberates slaves (Exodus), who causes empires to fall and raises up the oppressed (117).

When Freire writes of pedagogy and revolutionary struggle as manifestations of the "prophetic church," I thus take him to be arguing that both must follow in the tradition of the prophets whose message is simultaneously one of "denunciation in the face of injustice, exploitation, and oppression" *and* annunciation of the kingdom of peace to come (Nava 2001, 133). Gerald Bruns (1992) notes that the prophets were often outsiders or adversaries to the official institution of the monarchy and the priestly cults. The prophetic word therefore does not repeat existing orthodoxy or draw its authority from the canon. Rather, as the medium through which the message of God speaks, the prophets critique the present from the standpoint of the future. As Gutierrez (1996) suggests, this double orientation toward both the present and the future is what distinguishes the

prophets from the priests, who are concerned only with tradition. The prophet's word "cannot be understood as a continuation of what went before" (86); it instead serves as a "witness" to the present and locates in "proximate historical events" a "projection toward the future" yet to come (87). As Roberto Rivera (2004) explains, for Gutierrez the eschatological promises made by the prophets are oriented toward the future, but they are not located in an atemporal eternal time. Rather these promises are historical: they occur within human time and are partially fulfilled through liberating action in the present.

For Freire, as for Gutierrez, the prophetic church is "the church of hope" because exists in this disjointed temporality in which the future erupts into the present, and the present thus becomes a time of "new and unsuspected possibilities" (Gutierrez 1973, 168). Just as the prophets started with the "historical vicissitudes" of the social and historical contexts in which they were located (Gutierrez 1996, 87), Freire (1985) similarly argues that the prophetic church, while utopian and hopeful, is not escapist. It begins with the "world as it really is" – with the present context of oppression (138). It is therefore endowed with what Walter Benjamin (1968) called "weak messianic power" – a power to redeem that can only be realized in history through class struggle (246). In other words, the kingdom of peace requires justice for the oppressed in the present moment (Giroux and McLaren 1997). It requires historical liberation. As Freire (1994) writes in *Pedagogy of Hope*: "there is no authentic utopia apart from the tension between denunciation of a present becoming more and more intolerable, and the 'annunciation,' announcement, of a future to be created, built – politically, esthetically, and ethically – by us" (81). Freire thus sees revolutionary action, rooted in a pedagogy of the oppressed, as

"prophetic" because it enables the profane redemption of injustice and misery through political solidarity, which he defines a relation to the other founded in love, mutual recognition, and reciprocal understanding (McLaren 2000). This notion of love is therefore not a romantic or sentimental one. Rather it is an act of ethical obligation to end suffering and misery in concert with the oppressed (Freire 2006).[116]

V. Freire's Andro- and Anthropo-centrisms

Freire's proposals for critical literacy education constitute a significant challenge to the colonial legacies of literacy that undergird both neo-imperial and international feminist approaches to literacy, which (despite their differences) maintain a conceptual and political division between the literate and the illiterate and knowledge and ignorance. Freire's project disrupts the unequal relations of intellectual production, pedagogy, and communication upon which these approaches are based – relations that grant the Western literate subject the exclusive right to know and speak for the "illiterate" other. It thus serves as an important reminder that any feminist project of decolonizing literacies must be grounded in the experiences and knowledge of those deemed "illiterate" as agents of their word and world. Yet, while I follow Chela Sandoval (2000) in suggesting that theories of decolonization that developed in response to previous modes of colonization provide significant guides for establishing effective forms of resistance at the beginning of the twenty-first century and offer ways of "imagining postcoloniality in its most utopian sense" (9), I also approach Freire as he approached the pedagogy of the oppressed, revolutionary struggle, and the prophetic church: not as a static or fixed

[116] See Darder (2002) for a discussion of Freire's pedagogy of love.

tradition – not as orthodoxy – but as an unfinished project. As I mentioned above, Freire argues that a pedagogy of the oppressed, if it is not to sediment into an instrumentalist form of education, requires constant critical reflection on its own limits and on those moments when it reproduces the very logic of coloniality it seeks to undo. In what follows, I want to engage in just such a critical reflexive practice and briefly address what I view as Freire's failure to adequately question the normative Western white bourgeois definition of the "human" that informs colonial and neo-imperial approaches to literacy – a definition that, as I suggested in Chapters One and Two, draws from and reproduces not only cultural and racial but also gender, sexual, generational, and species hierarchies in order to mark certain groups of people as infrahuman or inhuman.

The first shortcoming of Freire's theory of decolonizing literacy can be located in his failure to adequately address the role of gender and sexual difference to the colonial project, and thus to recognize multiple forms of domination and resistance. As I pointed out in Chapter Two, colonization was a gendered and sexualized project. Colonial powers frequently secured the division between colonizer and colonized upon which their rule relied through appeals to gender and sexual difference. As Lugones (2007) suggests, the gender and sexual arrangements of the colonizer – organized around binaristic concepts of sex/gender and compulsory heterosexuality – were taken as evidence of the colonizer's superiority in contrast to the the traditional communal relations, systems of political authority, and socioeconomic organization and property relations of pre-contact societies, some of which were premised on egalitarian gender relations and recognized multiple genders and sexual practices. At the same time, the colonizers often sought to reorganize

indigenous societies – through religious conversion and legal mechanisms, for instance – according to a Western sex/gender binary and hierarchy that was predicated upon the patriarchal power of "men" over "women" and a form of compulsory heterosexuality that reduced multiple sexes and genders to a sexual dimorphism that masquerades as bio-real sex (Lugones 2007).

To the extent Freire's anti-colonial project is premised on a dualistic model of oppressor/oppressed and focuses only one form of oppression – that between the colonizer and the colonized – it offers an incomplete theory of colonialism that overlooks how the subordination of colonial women and those whose genders and sexualities do not match the cis-normative colonial modern sex/gender binary was a central technique through which colonial powers sought to conquer, oppress, and destroy pre-contact societies. At the same time, since this dualistic model of oppression treats the colonizer and colonized as homogenous groups, it cannot account for the gendered and sexual hierarchies within colonial communities that were often the product of the new cis-gendered hetero-patriarchal sex/gender arrangements that the colonizers imposed on indigenous societies. Put more simply, Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed overlooks the multiple structures of domination and subordination that operate within colonized communities.

In his later works, especially *Pedagogy of Hope*, Freire (2006) attempted to develop a more complex understanding of domination than that found in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. He thus sought to address some feminist critiques of his earlier work, particularly of the andocentric language used in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and his

failure to address "the overlapping and multiple forms of domination revealed in 'reading the world' of experience," as Kathleen Weiler (1991) put it (469).[117] However, he never advanced a comprehensive analysis of unequal relations of gender and sexual power. By occluding how gender and sexual relations and hierarchies mediate the relations between and among the colonized, Freire not only offers a limited account of how oppression functions. He also ends up advancing a gendered vision of decolonization that privileges the male as the appropriate subject of decolonization (hooks 1995). And, in doing so, Freire's work replicates and demonstrates affinity with the very structures of colonial patriarchy that grant the (heterosexual and cis-gendered) male subject exclusive power and control. It thus continues to uphold what Wynter (2003) identifies as colonial definition of the human, or the "overrepresentation" of the white bourgeois definition of "Man" as if it were the only conception of the human (260).

Missing from Freire's account of critical literacy is therefore an acknowledgement that struggles for decolonization must transform not only the colonizer/colonized relation, but also gender and sexual hierarchies within colonized communities as well. For instance, as I noted above, Freire grounds his vision of decolonizing struggles in a model of pedagogical and communicative relations as a "communion" between teacher and student, revolutionary leaders and the "people," who meet as autonomous subjects engaged in dialogic relations of reciprocity and mutual recognition. Yet, his pedagogy of the oppressed overlooks the multiple relations of power that structure communicative interaction and that inform relations not only between the "oppressor" and the

[117]See May (2005) for a discussion of this shift in Friere's work. For some feminist critique of Freire, see Weiler (1991); Brady (1994); and hooks (1995).

"oppressed" but also between and among the "oppressed" – relations that render certain voices amongst the "oppressed" more audible and credible than others. As contemporary feminist scholarship in the field of social epistemology has revealed, the social location of knowers in hierarchies of power and privilege largely determines "who gets to speak, who is heard as authoritative," and what comes to count as knowledge (Rouse 2003, 157).[118] As Miranda Fricker (1998) indicates, these hierarchal relations operate to assign epistemic authority and credibility to those with social power, while denying the same to the powerless – a phenomenon she calls "epistemic injustice" (170). While Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed challenges the colonial monologue that excludes the colonized from the realm of intellectual labour, his work does not address how relations of gender and sexual power operate within both the classroom and decolonizing struggles to similarly exclude marginalized subjects from authorship, intellectual production, epistemic credibility, and thus from equal communicative relations (Wieler 1991; Brady 1994; hooks 1995). While Freire's vision of decolonization as a pedagogical process founded in ethical communicative relations is a worthwhile project, his pedagogy of the oppressed must be extended and deepened in order to develop a more complex understanding of how various forms of oppression and privilege (not solely the colonizer/colonized relation) constrain and produce the possibilities for communication both between teachers and students and within political struggles for decolonization.

At the same time, if Freire's project is to adequately address relations of gender and sexual power, his emphasis on dialogue as the model for both communicative ethics

[118] For feminist critiques of knowledge production, see Haraway (1991); Harding (1991); Scott (1992); and Code (1995).

and decolonization struggles must be widened to account for multiple forms of resistance that do not grant primacy to "voice" as a condition of freedom. In other words, a pedagogy of the oppressed must be attuned not only to how existing epistemic hierarchies impede communication and silence the voices and knowledge of the marginalized, but also to how silence might serve as a strategy of resistance for those excluded from positions of epistemic authority. As Jane Parpart (2010) notes, uncritical identification of "voice" with agency and empowerment, and silence with disempowerment, obscures the many strategies of silence used by subaltern subjects, particularly by subaltern women, to negotiate patriarchal relations of power. At times, silence and secrecy serve as important survival strategies for subaltern subjects in what Parpart calls an "often masculinist, dangerous, and conflict-ridden world" (2). At other times, these silent acts may take the form of public demonstrations and vigils – such as the silent protests of the *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* in Argentina, the Kurdish Mothers of the Lost in Turkey, and Women in Black (established by a collective of Israeli and Palestinian women) (Parpart 2010) – or of everyday performances of femininity – such as the parodic Hindi subversive song and dance numbers by poor women in India (Kapur 2001). Hence, while Freire (2000) is correct to point to the importance of challenging how the banking method of education treats the oppressed as passive vessels of the teacher's knowledge and thus imposes on them a "culture of silence" that "deprive[s] men of the right to speak up" (9, 48), in his work silence figures exclusively as a symbol of oppression and domination for which dialogue is the sole antidote. He therefore never explores those moments when the

oppressed might deploy silence, rather than dialogue, as a political strategy to subvert or challenge their oppression.

Another limitation of Freire's work is located in his anthropocentric and speciesist argument for human liberation, which is grounded in his claim that humans are not only distinct from non-human animals, but are also superior to them and thus should be treated differently from them (Corman 2011). Just as Nussbaum's capabilities approach locates the cause of Third World women's oppression in their animal-like status, throughout *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Freire frequently appeals to the human/animal distinction to explain the operations of oppression and the necessity for human freedom. Freire (2000) presents non-human animals as non-literate, mute, and non-communicative "beings in themselves," which lack self-awareness and agency, and are fundamentally ahistorical creatures that exist outside time (97; see also Corman 2011). Freire argues that oppression results in dehumanization: in the reduction of humans to the animal-like status of passive objects that are acted upon and that "live in a world to which they can give no meaning" (98) Freire's project of critical literacy seeks to challenge this dehumanization by claiming that the humanity of the oppressed can never be fully eradicated, and that the actualization of their full human potential for communication, critical self-reflection, and transformative action on the world (qualities that animals lack) can occur only through the transcendence of their status as animal (see also Corman 2011).

It is not surprising that Freire deploys the human/animal dichotomy to make a case for human freedom from oppression. As Chapter Two of this study reveals, colonial and racist discourses typically drew from discourses of animalism to portray the oral

cultures of the indigenous peoples of the Americas and of African slaves (and their concomitant gender and sexual "perversity") as signs of their closeness to animals, their difference from their literate masters, and thus as justification for the violence and enslavement to which they were sentenced. Freire attempts to expand the category of the human to include people excluded from it and to transform this category so that the human is defined not by the capacity for domination (as it is in the colonial definition) but by creative and transformative action that can be realized only in ethical relations of love and responsibility with other humans. His project thus needs to be read as a challenge to how the logic of coloniality justified human oppression, slavery, and torture by marking certain groups of humans as akin to animals.

In my view, however, Freire's redefinition of the human is incomplete because it is founded upon an epistemological and ontological distinction between the human and the animal in which the animal functions not only as the other of the human, but also as evidence of what humans have overcome and "as proof of human dignity" (Horkheimer and Adorno 1998, 245). There are several problems with this foundational premise. First, it transforms a question of ethics – of how humans should relate to others – into a question of knowledge – of what makes humans so different from animals that they should not be treated the same as them. As a consequence, his argument for a pedagogy of the oppressed as a relation founded in love, mutual recognition, and reciprocal understanding becomes conditional upon his knowledge claims about the difference between humans and animals rather than upon an ethical relation to an-other based on acknowledgement and respect. This ethical relation, as Levinas (1969) suggests and as I

shall discuss in more detail in the next chapter, is irreducible to knowledge claims about the other. Since the other, including the non-human other, exceeds all categories of understanding, ethics must instead be understood as the responsibility of the knower prior to and as the condition of knowing and understanding (Cohen 1986). As Richard A. Cohen (1986) notes in his introduction to an anthology on Levinas, ethics "disrupts the entire project of knowing with a higher call, a more severe 'condition': responsibility" (5).

Second, Freire's reduction of an ethical question to an epistemic one leads him to develop an account of the human and the animal that reifies and totalizes both categories, and that therefore ultimately denies the excess or difference inherent to each which defy capture by thought. In Freire's model, the humanness of the human – its capacity for reason, communication, dialogue, transformative action, and time – is cast in opposition to the animality of the animal – its dependency, immediacy, and lack of reason and history.[119] Such a dichotomization entails a denial of the animal in the human and projection of our animality onto other-than human animals (Oliver 2009). Putting aside the problem of whether Freire's definition of the human would include infants or those deemed intellectually "disabled" and/or "mute," it seems that this positing of the human as mutually exclusive of the animal requires that humans forget what Kelly Oliver (2009) calls our kinship with non-human animals: our dependency on the material world, vulnerability, and irrationality. At the same time, as Rachel Corman (2011) notes, the human/animal dichotomy at the heart of Friere's theory of liberatory education reifies

[119] See also Corman (2001). See Oliver (2009) for how a similar opposition informs in modern and postmodern thought.

non-human animals, positing them as unchanging and non-dialogical "beings in themselves" that act passively on the world around them. Not only has this definition been challenged by biologists and primatologists who have demonstrated non-human animals' capacity for communication, subjectivity, consciousness, and agency (Corman 2011). The larger problem here is that, while Freire wants to challenge the banking model of education that reduces students to the status passive objects subjected to the teacher's demands, his account of the human/animal divide treats animals in the same way that the banking model treats students: as things to be controlled by others rather than as complex beings with their own unique agencies.

Freire thus attempts to challenge one hierarchy – oppressor/oppressed – by re-installing another – human/animal. Within his framework, the animal serves as the foundation for his ethico-politics of human liberation from oppression, yet is also excluded from it (Corman 2011). Freire thus inadvertently reproduces the same logic of domination that he has shown enables the "oppressed" (which for him includes only humans) to be treated as "things." As Horkheimer and Adorno point out, the human/animal dichotomy at the heart of Western thought is a central feature of a form of instrumental reason that reduces both human and other-than-human animals to the status of inanimate/irrational objects to be exchanged, controlled, and dominated – a process that Lukács calls reification and Freire calls dehumanization (Thomson 2006; A. Bell 2011).

For Adorno (1951), this mutual thingification of human and non-human animals

is most apparent in the pogroms and concentration camps. As Adorno writes in *Minima Moralia*:

> The constantly encountered assertion that savages, blacks, Japanese are like animals, monkeys for example, is key to the pogrom. The possibility of pogroms is decided in the moment when the gaze of a fatally-wounded animal falls on a human being. The defiance with which he repels this gaze – 'after all, its only an animal' – reappears irresistibly in cruelties done to human beings, the perpetrators have again and again to reassure themselves that it is 'only an animal' because they could never fully believe this even of animals (105).

Here, Adorno is claiming not that humans and non-human animals are the same, but rather that the same logic of domination that allows for animals to be reduced to "things" also undergirds the thingification of the human. The exploitation of human and non-human animals is thus mutually constitutive: the extermination of both the human and the non-human animal is made possible by the abhorrence of the animal's suffering and therefore the abhorrence of the animal in the human, which is most manifest in instances of human suffering (see also Mendieta 2011). For Adorno, it is the very division between the human and animal (this hatred of the animal that the human is also) that enables violence against both human and non-human animals (Lippit 2000). Yet, as he also points out, there is always a remainder – which Adorno calls "the gaze" – in both the human *and* the animal that defies and is irreducible to this process of thingification and violence.

Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the human/animal binary thus reveals that critical theory cannot adequately challenge oppression and violence by re-installing a dividing line between the human and the animal – by reaffirming the humanity of the human and the animality of the animal (as Freire does) – since this division is at the heart of a logic of domination turns both human and non-human animals into things and thereby justifies their oppression. Rather, they show that the human/animal division must itself be called into question in order to challenge both human and non-human suffering.

The posthumanist philosopher Cary Wolfe (2003) advances a similar argument when he claims that "we all, human and non-human alike, have a stake in the discourse and institution of speciesism; it is by no means limited to its overwhelmingly direct and disproportionate effect on animals" (7). Rather, it should be of concern to those committed to ending human suffering as well. Wolfe writes:

> as long as this humanist and speciesist structure of subjectivization remains intact, and as long as it is institutionally taken for granted that it is right to systematically exploit and kill non-human animals simply because of their species, then the humanist discourse of species will always be available for use by some humans against other human as well to countenance violence against the social other of whatever species – or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference (8).

My concern is therefore that when Freire grounds his theory of liberatory education in a human/animal binary that posits the superiority of the human, and fails to link human liberation to the liberation of other-than-human nature, he risks upholding rather than

challenging the very discourses of animalism and speciesism that have been deployed historically and in the present-day to justify the oppression of those human groups deemed subhuman or infrahuman. But, it is also that, by failing to challenge the human/animal dichotomy that has been used to rationalize the oppression of and violence against both human and non-human animals, Freire misses an opportunity to expand his theory of critical literacy to encompass non-human nature and to thereby develop a more robust vision of decolonizing pedagogy. In this vision, critical literacy – as a critical reading and writing of the word and the world – would be founded not on speciesist claims of human superiority over the world, but instead as an ethics of responsibility to the animate and inanimate beings of a world that both contains and is other-than-the human.

VI. Conclusion

A feminist approach to decolonizing literacies has much to learn from both the promises and limitations of Freire's theory of critical literacy as a "pedagogy of the oppressed." Freire's significance lies firstmost in his attempt to transform the division between the literate and illiterate – and the concomitant divisions between teacher and student, knowledge and ignorance, intellectual and manual labour – that historically and in the present-day have been deployed to construct the "illiterate" as a non-human other without agency and voice. Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* instead advances an approach to critical literacy as a mode of "liberating praxis" that repositions those deemed "illiterate" as the subjects of literacy, the educators of the educated, and thus as agents of their own liberation from colonial structures of dehumanization and objectification. Yet, his model

of dialogical cultural action fails to adequately address the unequal relations of gender and sexual power at work in communicative interactions – relations that must be the target of any decolonizing struggle that does not seek to produce a new form of oppression. At the same time, his anthropocentric and speciesist argument for human liberation fails to adequately challenge the human/animal division that colonial powers historically used to justify violence against those peoples they classified as "oral" or illiterate.

If Freire's proposals for critical literacy education are to retain their critical purchase on the present, and offer resources for a feminist approach to decolonizing literacies, his failure to grapple with the gendered and sexualized dimensions of decolonization and his anthropocentrism must be acknowledged and worked through. I suggest that such a critique does not represent an abandonment of Freire's project. Rather, it is in keeping with Freire's own request that scholar-activists committed to critical literacy keep his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* open to critical revision. Freire himself reminded readers that his proposals in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* reflected the socio-political relations present in Latin America during the 1960s; in the last years of his life, he therefore suggested that these proposals "have to be reinvented and recreated according to the demands – pedagogical and political demands – of the specific situation" (Freire 1997, 309). This reinvention therefore requires that attention be devoted as much to the failures of Freire's project as to its promises. It also demands that the changing nature of re-colonization in the wake of neo-liberal globalization and the new imperialism

be taken into account in our revisioning of literacy as a decolonizing pedagogical practice – a project that I turn to in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

REFLECTIONS ON GAYATRI SPIVAK'S POSTCOLONIAL LITERACIES

Gatayri Spivak's theories of "transnational literacy" and "subaltern literacy" can be read as reinventions of Freire's project of critical literacy for the present-day. Spivak is best known for her attempt to develop a form of literary criticism that synthesizes Marxism, deconstruction, and feminism. She brings this recombinant approach to bear on a diverse range of fields: from the humanities – philosophy, literature, history, and cultural studies – to international development and area studies. While critics often place her work under the rubric of "postcolonialism," Spivak (1999a) seeks to distance herself from such a label because of what she sees as the depoliticization of postcolonial studies as it transformed from a critique of colonialism into a celebration of the hybridity and marginality of Eurocentric migration. Yet, although Spivak may be wary of the term postcolonial, Ritu Birla (2010) suggests that postcolonial studies' original impetus nevertheless remains evident in her oeuvre: in her critique of past and ongoing colonial formations; of the proclivity of movements for national sovereignty and decolonization to merely reverse the colonizer/colonized divide and thus to establish the hegemony of a new national bourgeoisie rather than radically transform social relations of oppression; of the failure of both decolonizing struggles and the radical intellectuals who study them to account for relations of gender oppression;[120] and of the recolonization of formerly colonized nation-states by the neo-liberal policies of Western states and international

[120] For Spivak's critique of the Subaltern School's account of colonial history see her essay "Deconstructing Historiography" in Spivak (1998); for her discussion of subaltern women's place in decolonization, see her essay on Mahasweta Devi's "Breast Giver" in "A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Women's Text for the Third World" in Spivak (1998).

financial institutions (such as the International Monetary Fund [I.M.F.] and the World Bank) that have required postcolonial states to radically restructure their political economies as a precondition for receiving aid and thus have made it impossible for such states to fulfill the promises of anti-colonial struggles for sovereignty and self-determination.[121]

In *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (*Critique*), Spivak (1999a) traces the trajectory of her work from the type of colonial discourse analysis originally precipitated by Said's study of Orientalism towards what she argues is the current focus of her research: transnational feminist cultural studies. This interdisciplinary field maps how the transnational movements of capital, cultures, peoples, and communities described in studies of globalization, diasporas, and international migration have created unequal linkages between and among differently-situated subjects globally. These movements, transnational feminists suggest, privilege Western elite feminists while exacerbating the exploitation and oppression of people in the global south, especially "subaltern women" or women of the rural poor. Although a concern with pedagogy informs much of Spivak's work (Ray 2009), in the decade after the publication of *Critique*, Spivak frequently deploys the transnational feminist framework she develops therein to analyze her experiences as a teacher "at both ends of spectrum" (2004a): in New York (what she calls "this end" of the spectrum) and in rural communities in India (what she calls "the other end") (124).[122]

[121] For Spivak's assessment of the politics of recolonization, see Spivak (1995a) and (1999a).
[122] Her pedagogical writings include Spivak (2002a); Spivak (2002b); Spivak (2003); Spivak (2004a, 2004b); Chakravorty et al. (2006); Spivak (2008); and Spivak (2010a).

Her approach to "transnational literacy" was inspired by her experience "at this end" as Professor of Comparative Literature at Columbia University, and by her conviction that such elite educational institutions train diasporic female students in the logic of a new civilizing mission of corporate benevolence and indoctrinate them into the belief that they are the ones to "right wrongs" of suffering others (Spivak 2004b). For Spivak, transnational literacy can challenge this doctrine of Western superiority by highlighting these students' privileged location in and complicity with global capitalist relations of production and power that create and perpetuate such suffering. Her theory of "subaltern literacy" emerged from her work as a teacher trainer and educator at "the other end" of the spectrum, in schools for the rural poor in India. There, Spivak (2002a) argues, subaltern girls and women have been excluded from the promises of national liberation and are taught literacy solely through the techniques of rote memorization, which Spivak argues trains them to accept their subalternity and oppresion as normal. "Subaltern literacy," she suggest, can counter this normality by developing a form of collective agency amongst the subaltern in general, and subaltern girls and women in particular.

To the extent that Spivak's work critiques the strategic absence of subaltern women from national liberation struggles, it offers an important corrective to Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed and addresses the absence of gender from his project of critical literacy. However, my contention in what follows is that Spivak's reimaginings of literacy, while drawing from different traditions of critique than Freire and offering a more complex approach to decolonization, do not constitute a complete break with the type of anti-colonial project advanced in his work. Rather, her theories of transnational

literacy and subaltern literacy complement and represent a continuation of Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed.[123] While Spivak never offers a thorough discussion of Freire, much of her pedagogical writings cite Freire as a key influence. Moreover, her rethinking of rural literacy programs for the poor explicitly draws upon his warning that the oppressed can become new oppressors unless movements for decolonization are grounded in a critical, self-reflexive pedagogy of the oppressed.[124] My argument, however, is that Freire's influence on Spivak is more far-reaching than she explicitly acknowledges. Her approaches to "transnational literacy" – which she directs toward tertiary-level diasporic female students living in the West – and "subaltern literacy" – which is oriented toward subaltern girls and women – share a common goal with Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed: to undo the division between the literate and the illiterate, teacher and student, and intellectual and manual labour; or, as Spivak (2004b) puts it, to challenge "the production of class apartheid" (561).

However, I also propose that, while Spivak continues Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, her theory of transnational literacy is limited and ends up bolstering the unequal relations of intellectual production that Freire challenges. In *Critique*, Spivak (1999a) suggests that only "New Immigrant" intellectuals located in the Western academy are in a position to become transnationally literate. In contrast, she claims that the mothers and grandmothers of these intellectuals – whom she refers to as the

[123] As Ray (2009) suggest, Robert Young alludes to this connection in his introduction one of Spivak's lectures.
[124] Spivak briefly mentions Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed in "At Both Ends of the Spectrum" (Spivak 2004a), "Righting Wrongs" (Spivak 2004b), and the concluding chapter of a collection reflecting on the anniversary of the publication of Spivak's article, "Can the Subaltern Speak" (Spivak 2010).

"disenfranchised women of the diaspora" – lack access to full citizenship and education; as a consequence, they cannot "even conceive of ridding [their] mind[s] of the burden of transnationality" (400). Spivak's account of transnational literacy seeks to highlight the "sanctioned ignorance" of upwardly-mobile female students and thus to challenge both neo-imperial and international feminist accounts of literacy that represent Westerners as saviours of less fortunate "illiterate Third World women" (319). Yet, by privileging the Western-located academic as the sole practitioner of transnational literacy, Spivak ends up reproducing the very class division that her account aims to undo. In so doing, she overlooks the forms of transnational literacy cultivated by those "disenfranchised women of the diaspora" who are excluded from the subject position of the "intellectual" (Ruddy 2008).

In my view, these limitations can be best addressed by rethinking Spivak's theory of transnational literacy from the perspective of Freire's "oppressed," and by locating some distinctively Freirean moments in Spivak's own texts that point toward the undoing of this division of intellectual labour. I suggest that this undoing is most evident in Spivak's published works after *Critique*. There, she moves away from her earlier account of transnational literacy as a practice of reading and writing that enables Western academics to "unlearn our privilege as our loss" (Spivak 1990, 10). She instead redefines both transnational and subaltern literacies as ways of "learning to learn from below" (Spivak 2003, 35): a learning open to the "imagined agency of the other" and the unexpected response of students (Spivak 2004b, 541). This redefinition, I show, both extends Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed as a mode of learning from below, and

complicates his reciprocal model of pedagogical and communicative relations by rethinking his pedagogy through Levinas's ethics as the responsibility of the self to and for the other.

Drawing upon Levinas's language of the non-reciprocity, heteronomy, and alterity of the other, Spivak advances a theory of education that begins with the asymmetry and elusiveness of the encounter between teacher and student. As a consequence, she takes more seriously than both liberal feminist internationalists and Freire the role of indigenous knowledges and of silence in education, and the importance of diversity to any political collective. At the same time, her accounts of transnational and subaltern literacy have led her to develop a theory of planetarity that challenges the human/non-human dichotomy reproduced in Freire's work. Hence, even as I argue that Freire offers a way to work through some of Spivak's limitations, I also show that Spivak's theories of transnational and subaltern literacies address some of the weaknesses not only of Freire's approach, but of the international feminism that informs Nussbaum's capabilities approach and Ellis's *The Breadwinner* as well.

Before exploring Spivak's account of "subaltern literacy" and her work as a teacher trainer in rural Indian schools, I first turn to her theory of transnational literacy and trace the continuities and discontinuities between this approach and Freire's. Yet, while I discuss Spivak's accounts of transnational literacy and subaltern literacy separately, it is important to note that she conceives of them as two sides of the same project (Spivak 2010a). Spivak (2004b, 568) argues that both are "interruptive, supplementary" to those instrumentalist forms of education whose primary function, as

Althusser (1971) put it, is to reproduce the unequal capitalist relations of intellectual production by training one group of students to be the masters of the ruling ideology and another to submit to this ideology.

I. Transnational Literacy as a New Pedagogy of the Oppressed?

Spivak's theory and practice of transnational literacy emerged as a challenge to those elite forms of university education in the West that prepare students to be new "emissaries" of transnational capitalism, or what Althusser calls masters of the ruling ideology (Spivak 2003, 52). As Michael Rothberg (2005) notes, Spivak never offers a concise definition of transnational literacy; she instead leaves readers to track its "effects through her reading practices" (123). While some of Spivak's essays in the 1990s – particularly "Teaching for the Times" (1995a) and "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World" (1996) – provide preliminary sketches of this approach, she offers her most systematic account of it in the final chapter of *Critique*. There, she proposes that transnational capitalism imposes a new demand upon the "interventionist academic" and educator working in the North Atlantic academy (Spivak 1999a, 401): to cultivate in students a method for reading both written texts and the world that will enable a persistent critique of their privileged position within capitalist globalization and of the unequal geopolitical and economic relations and processes it has precipitated.

Echoing Freire's definition of critical literacy as a mode of reading and writing the word and the world, Spivak (1995a) similarly views literacy, not simply as a set of technical reading and writing skills, but also the ability to read the world as a text, as a site of "social inscription" (14; Sanders 2006). For Spivak (1999a), critical literacy as a

decolonizing project must respond to the demands of the present; it thus needs to address the changing nature of colonization in a global capitalist system that has altered the territorial organization of economic activity and state sovereignty, and precipitated new movements of capital and peoples across borders.[125] Transnational literacy requires that students learn to read not only the asymmetrical linkages between first world and third world created by economic globalization and patterns of Eurocentric migration. They must also learn about their privileged position in a New World Order that benefits a minority while exacerbating the oppression of subaltern women in the global south who, as I demonstrated in Chapter One, are the frequent targets of capitalist development. Spivak calls this reading of linkages and subject-positions "transnational literacy," which she argues does not produce an expert knowledge but only a "persistent effort and deferral of fulfillment" (110): persistent because there is no escape from the privileged position that her students inhabit and deferred because the transnational literate subject must always reflect on the limits of his or her own knowledge (Sanders 2006; Ray 2009).

Hence, while Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed takes as it departure point the standpoint of oppressed peoples, Spivak's approach to transnational literacy suggests that the project of critical literacy as a method and pedagogy of decolonization must focus not only on the oppressed but also on those privileged within global hierarchies of power and privilege. Spivak's approach has been adopted by a number of scholars who seek to

[125] When Spivak suggests that literacy education, as a potential contributor to a new cultural-politics of decolonization, should be situated within the context of the current phase of transnational capital and population movements, I do not read her as insinuating that the nation-state no longer is a key actor in the global political economy. Spivak's argument, however, is that in a period where the ability of capital to move production, distribution, and consumption beyond national boundaries has intensified, and has initiated a new phase of mass population movements, we must learn to think transnationally.

challenge the complicity of Northern educators and students in capitalist globalization (Sanders 2006). Yet, it is important to note that in "Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World" and *Critique*, Spivak identifies the explicit target of transnational literacy and the implied reader of her work more narrowly as the "new and old diasporic woman's" daughters and granddaughters, "whichever generation first arrives on the threshold of tertiary education" (Spivak 1999a, 401). Spivak (1999a) focuses on these "New Immigrant" nascent intellectuals for several reasons (356). She worries that these "gendered outsiders inside…are much in demand by the transnational agencies of globalization for employment and collaboration" (402). These new upwardly mobile professionals – what I (following McRobbie) referred to in Chapters One and Three as "top girls" or female subjects of success – are frequently required to act as "native informants" or experts of their home countries for transnational corporations; they are therefore asked to facilitate the recolonization of postcolonial societies as a condition of their professional advancement (360). While the concept of the "native informant" originates within anthropological discourse and refers to those indigenous subjects who provide information about cultural practices to Western anthropologists (Morton 2007), Spivak uses the term more broadly to reference any instance when a member of an identity group is called to speak as an expert on and to represent the authentic voice of the group to outsiders (see also Khan 2006). Spivak argues that the aim of *Critique* is to trace the genealogy of the native informant from the colonial period to the current era of globalization and empire. During the period of colonialism, the native informant enabled effective colonial governance by acting as an intermediary between

the imperial powers and indigenous peoples (Sanders 2006). Today, the native informant position is occupied by the "New immigrant" intellectual living in the West, who is called upon by disciplines as diverse as third world literature, area studies, and business management to speak as an authority on her home country and to make the subaltern speak back to the West in ways that confirm Western discourse on the global south.

Spivak criticizes the "native informant" position not simply because it turns the diasporic woman's daughters and granddaughters into collaborators with the "new empire" (311). She is wary of any easy recourse to a form of identity politics that would collapse the difference between diasporic intellectuals and those subaltern subjects of the global south whom such intellectuals claim to represent (Sanders 2006; Ray 2009). When "New Immigrant" intellectuals and students assume the role of the "native informant" for global capitalism and claim to speak as the authentic representatives of the subaltern, they disavow their own role in knowledge production and the politics of representation. Spivak links her critique of the "New Immigrant" as "native informant" to her earlier, now famous, critique of Foucault and Deleuze in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In that essay, Spivak (1988) challenges Foucault's and Deleuze's claim that the role of the intellectual is to allow or make room for the oppressed masses to speak for themselves. For Spivak, such a claim effaces the role of the poststructuralist critic in representing the oppressed, and thereby renders invisible the processes through which the critic assumes the position to speak for and know what the oppressed want. In *Critique*, Spivak (1999a) argues that when "New Immigrant" intellectuals and students become "native informants" of their home country, they reproduce the failures of Foucault and Deleuze:

they abdicate responsibility for their own position as producers of knowledge about the subaltern at "home"; at the same time, they produce the subaltern as self-identical and accessible in its immediacy to the West, and thereby efface the heterogeneity and contradictions of the subaltern consciousness. In other words, when the "New immigrant" intellectual is made to stand in and speak for the subaltern in the global south, the subaltern subject is effectively effaced: "the postcolonial *migrant* become[s] the norm, thus occluding the native once again" (256, *emphasis in original*).

Spivak takes the daughters and granddaughters of the diasporic woman "old and new" as the target of her teaching for another reason. Given that the "New Immigrant" as "native informant" at once usurps and erases the subject-position of the subaltern, Spivak criticizes that strand of postcolonial studies that celebrates the hybrid identities of diasporic subjects as the new site of resistance under conditions of capitalist globalization (Ray 2009). Such a celebratory discourse fails to acknowledge the privileges that accrue to Eurocentric migrants, particularly those from the middle and upper classes in their home countries (Sanders 2006). For Spivak, the postcolonial migrant to the West, far from being inherently resistant to the logic of capitalism, most often aspires to upward class mobility under capitalism. While migrant academics may experience racism and marginalization in the global north, their experiences are not identical to those subaltern subjects who cannot escape into the diaspora and who are the targets of transnational capitalism in the "form of the patenting of indigenous knowledge and agriculture, microcredit programs for women, and population control" (310). To construe the migrant as inherently transgressive is to obscure the class division between those who migrate and

those who stay put. This is especially the case for the migrant intellectual whose access to tertiary education in the global north marks a class divide between themselves and subaltern women. This "New Immigrant" intellectual, Spivak argues, too often claims a marginal status instead of critically addressing her privileged position within the international division of labour in comparison to subaltern women at "home." Indeed, Spivak argues that the implied reader of her work – the diasporic women's daughters and granddaughters – often have more in common with the descendants of the colonial subject in the global south than with the racial underclass in the global north or rural poor subaltern subjects.

While in *Critique* Spivak traces how the "New Immigrant" intellectual is often trained to become the new managerial class required by transnational corporations, her more recent work explores how this same group is frequently targeted by human rights and global citizenship education. Such education seeks to produce subjects who will right the wrongs suffered by others in the world, and therefore appears benevolent in its intention and effect. In her address to an Amnesty International conference (subsequently published as "Human Rights, Human Wrongs" [2004b]), Spivak argues, however, that this education is actually another side of the same processes of recolonization that she analyses in *Critique*: if transnational capitalism hails the diasporic woman's upwardly mobile daughters and granddaughters as "native informants" who can speak on behalf of the subaltern women and thus better facilitate their exploitation, human rights and global citizenship education interpellates them into the civilizing mission of the new

imperialism – as dispensers of human rights who must save those unable to help themselves.

Spivak (2004b) notes that the West cannot claim ownership over the idea of human rights. But her concern is that the discourse of human rights often portrays rights as the exclusive property of the educated elite in both the West and the global south to bestow as a gift to the less fortunate. Human rights discourse is thus predicated on an implicit Social Darwinist notion that the fittest and most human should right the wrongs of those considered unfit and less-than human: those who will never be able to help themselves and thus require constant assistance from others because they are unable to "manage when they are left to manage on their own" (550; Cornell 2004). In Chapter Three, I explored how this discourse undergirds Nussbaum's capabilities approach and the use of *The Breadwinner* in feminist global citizenship education. Both, I argued, position Western girls and woman as the saviours of the "illiterate Third World woman" who is constructed as lacking agency and thus as unable to help herself. Spivak (2004a) similarly claims that human rights and global citizenship education at "this end of the spectrum" is frequently an education in Western superiority and benevolence (124): its primary aim is to inculcate the Western student in general, and the "New Immigrant" intellectual in particular, into "the conviction that I am necessarily better, I am necessarily indispensable, I am necessarily the one to right wrongs, I am necessarily the end product for which history happened..." (Spivak 2004b, 532).

For Spivak, such an education in benevolence fails to account for how the discourse of human rights is frequently used as an alibi for political, military, and

economic intervention in states of the global south; in other words, she is concerned with how appeals to natural rights (the rights that we have by virtue of being human) are frequently used to override the civil rights of postcolonial states (Cornell 2004). To the extent that Western students are hailed as dispensers of human rights, they are also potentially interpellated into an imperialist project of encroaching on the sovereignty of countries of the global south. At the same time, Spivak worries that human rights education installs a division of intellectual and manual labour between those who right wrongs and those who are wronged, between the agents and victims of human rights. While human rights activism seeks to help suffering others, to the extent that it produces a dividing line between helper and helped, it participates in the disenfranchisement of the helped because it denies them the agency to help themselves. Spivak's rebuke of human rights education thus can be read as akin to Freire's critique of the modern church: both human rights education and the modern church seek to offer remedies for injustice but neither sufficiently address the relations of what Spivak (2004b) calls "class apartheid" that create the continuing need for external intervention in the first place (529).

Spivak (2002a) thus concludes that the tertiary education offered to the diasporic woman's daughters and granddaughters is nothing more than an education in dominance that produces them as saviours of less fortunate women elsewhere. This education thus imparts what she calls a "mortal illiteracy" that "perpetuates the divided world" (127). By suggesting that migrant women's education at this "end of the spectrum" promotes a form of illiteracy, and that the knowledge imparted in tertiary education may actively produce ignorance of global capitalism, Spivak calls into question the literate/illiterate,

knowledge/ignorance division so central to imperial projects of domination and international feminist politics – both of which focus exclusively on the illiteracy of poor women while ignoring the "illiteracy" or lack of knowledge "at this end." Expanding upon Freire's edict that the educator must be educated, Spivak's (1999a) account of transnational literacy is meant to challenge this illiteracy or "sanctioned ignorance" so that these migrant women can see how their own privileges are connected to the very exploitation and oppression of the subaltern women they either seek to represent or rescue (319). Hence, while Freire, following Marx, was primarily concerned with cultivating a critical consciousness amongst the oppressed of the causes of their oppression and the possibilities for transformation, Spivak (2004b) argues that transnational literacy has a related, but distinct, goal: "to construct a collectivity among the dispensers of bounty" (537). This requires producing in diasporic woman's daughters and granddaughters a critical consciousness, what one might call a class consciousness, of their position – not as exclusive victims of migration but as agents from above. Spivak (1999a) suggests that this acknowledgement of complicity is the "basis of a decolonization of the mind" today; it is the necessary precondition for building a form of transnational feminist solidarity that does not assume the homogeneity of gendered experiences or take the Western woman as its moral centre (399).

II. "Learning to Learn From Below"

Spivak's theory of transnational literacy offers important correctives both to Nussbaum's capabilities approach – which seeks to reaffirm the subject position of the Western woman as a "dispenser of bounty" as the foundation of international feminism (Spivak

2004b, 537) – and to third-wave feminism – which celebrates the class mobility of young women and those who identify as gender variant without accounting for their privileged position in the new empire. Spivak instead offers a model of international feminism that challenges the division between the empowered, literate Western feminist who knows what is best and the "illiterate Third World woman" who requires salvation. Spivak's model of transnational literacy thus makes an important contribution to the feminist project of decolonizing literacies – to transforming the divisions between the literate/illiterate, rescuer/rescued, knowledge/ignorance, mental/manual labour characteristic of the coloniality of literacy.

However, her account reproduces these divisions in one crucial way: namely, by strategically excluding the uneducated woman of the diaspora ("new and old") from the capacity to become transnationally literate. As we have seen, Spivak (1999a) argues that her approach to transnational literacy is targeted at the new and old diasporic woman's daughters and granddaughters. But, she suggests that the precarious citizenship status of the "disenfranchised woman of the diaspora" (400) means that this woman, unlike her daughters and granddaughters, cannot "even conceive of ridding her mind of the burden of transnationality" (401). Spivak holds that this disenfranchised woman therefore should not be asked to develop a critical literacy of transnationality. The old and new diasporic woman's primary focus, Spivak contends, must be the struggle to access basic citizenship rights in her new "home" (Ruddy 2008). Spivak therefore recommends that "we [the interventionist academic] do not silence her, we do not ignore her suffering upon some impossible hierarchy of political correctness, and we desist from guilt-tripping her" (400-

401). Rather, as I have already highlighted, Spivak asks the interventionist academic to focus instead on the diasporic woman's daughters and granddaughters – those "New immigrant intellectuals" who have already gained access to the structures of upward class mobility in the West.

As I suggested in a previously published article, while Spivak rightly acknowledges the increased economic and political precarity experienced by migrants and refugees to Western countries, this "state of desperate choice or chance" does not necessarily prevent the "disenfranchised woman of the diaspora" from developing a transnational literacy of her own (Ruddy 2008). Reflecting on my own experiences teaching basic literacy to migrant and refugee women in Toronto, I argued that when Spivak's theory of transnational literacy is rearticulated from the perspective of Freire's "oppressed" we can begin to uncover the nascent forms of transnational literacy already being produced by the new and old diasporic woman in the community-based adult literacy class. Taking as my departure point the stories that migrant women tell as part of their literacy education, what literacy educators call "language experience stories," I suggested that the literacy practices of diasporic women are not only the practices of learning to read and write the word. They are also the practices of learning to read and write their everyday experiences of the mass displacement produced by transnational flows of capital. I therefore argued that, in transferring the difficult work of developing a transnational literacy from the diasporic woman to her higher-educated daughters and granddaughters, Spivak forecloses the agency of the diasporic woman, who in the act of learning to read and write already may be cultivating the type of transnational literacy

that Spivak so desires. In other words, by privileging the nascent "New Immigrant" academic as the sole practitioner of transnational literacy, Spivak reinstalls the division between intellectual and manual labour upon which colonial and neo-imperial approaches to literacy are based, and thus reproduces the very "class apartheid" her work seeks to undo.

To fully transform this division requires a theory of transnational literacy as a pedagogy of the oppressed: a pedagogy that seeks to transform, not only the educator, but also the situation of the oppressed, and that thus takes seriously the critical agency of oppressed peoples. Critics as diverse as Benita Parry, Warren Montag, and Asha Varadharajan have criticized Spivak's failure to account for the agency of the oppressed – for when the native speaks back to imperialism and affirms a new anti-colonial political identity (Parry 1987, 2004); for the "voices and actions of the masses as they wage their struggles for self-emancipation" (Montag 1998); and for when the colonized evade the identitarian logic of colonial discourse, which produces a negative Other to shore up the imperial subject as self-same (Varadharajan 1995). My intention here is not to rehearse these criticisms. I would instead like to suggest that such an approach to transnational literacy from below – as a pedagogy of the oppressed – is actually implicit in Spivak's work and may better represent the trajectory of her thinking in this area than her explicit declaration in *Critique* that transnational literacy is accessible only to professional intellectuals would indicate. Put differently, rather than relinquish Spivak's account of transnational literacy *tout court* as an instance of silencing the oppressed, I use her own method of producing a "mistaken reading" of texts of the cultural dominant to unpick her

theory of transnational literacy (Spivak 1999a, 9). In *Critique*, Spivak develops a "mistaken reading" of Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Bronte. Reading their texts from the margins – from the position of the subaltern subject or "native informant" – Spivak seeks not solely to uncover the axiomatics of imperialism embedded in the texts. She also hopes to find moments when these texts undo their own logic and produce another reading. Here, I read Spivak against herself – from the margins of her own text. My concern, in so doing, is not so much to expose how her text excludes the woman of the diaspora from the work of becoming transnationally literate, but rather to illuminate places in her own work that open up the possibilities for a new reading of transnational literacy from below.

One place where Spivak's account of transnational literacy as the task of professional intellectuals begins to unravel is in her description of her role as an observer of an adult education "remedial" English class at the City University of New York (Spivak 2002a). According to Spivak, the English-as-a-second language class was composed of Haitian, West African, Peurto Rican, and Dominican students, whose imaginations crossed multiple linguistic, national, and class boundaries. By Spivak's account, in class discussions, these students – whom she refers to as "new immigrant survival artists" – frequently reinterpreted the texts they encountered in the class in terms of their own experiences as working class migrants (124). For Spivak, this rewriting of texts according to the idiom of migrancy – what I suggest constitutes a form of transnational literacy – represents a flexibility of the imagination that she argues is missing among the undergraduate students she teaches at Columbia University. Yet, as

Spivak suggests, the working class students' robust imagination and ability to rewrite texts in their own idiom could not "graduate into a writing that can be recognized as fully literate because the teacher" could not recognize it as such (124). Rather than learn from the students' own idiom, the young East Asian female teacher – hired, Spivak assumes, because she too is a hyphenated-American, even though she is from the upper class – imposed on the students "academically approved" readings of the texts (124). Spivak refers to the teacher's failure to listen to and acknowledge the student's interpretations of the texts as a "missed encounter" with the other (125). Spivak's description of the remedial class reiterates aspects of her earlier critique of migrant identity politics (which collapses the distinction between the upper class and working class migrant) and follows Freire's maxim that the educator must herself be educated. Yet, there is also a shift here away from an exclusive focus on the diasporic woman's daughters and granddaughters – such as the young East Asian teacher mentioned above – and toward an acknowledgement of an emergent transnational literacy amongst the migrant underclass that the upper class migrant cannot hear.

A similar shift is notable in the final pages of *Critique*. There, Spivak (1999a) discusses her attendance at the performance and question period of a play, "Rifts of Silence," co-written and performed by a collective of Greek and Turkish women. The only member of the collective who was not part of the performance was a Hanife Ali, described in the programme as a "gypsy woman" whose husband had not allowed her to participate in the performance in New York. Spivak recounts that, during the discussion period, Ali was described by the play's director as someone who "drew her letters," and

thus as illiterate (408). Upon further inquiry, Spivak discovered that Ali was not as subservient as her description in the program made her appear: at the workshops where the play was composed, she refused to sit with either the Greek or Turkish women and chose instead to take a seat at the head of the table. Moreover, Spivak suggests that the description of Ali's literacy practices as a form of drawing rather than "writing" fails to acknowledge that conventional writing is itself a form of drawing, and that Ali, in wrenching "the performance of writing outside it felicity," might be instead demonstrating that "there is nothing proper to the letter in the convention of its writing" (408). For Spivak, the depiction of Ali as a passive illiterate woman is an example of how the subaltern woman is made to unspeak herself by benevolent feminists who seek to represent her according the pre-established script about what I have referred to in this dissertation as the "illiterate Third World woman." Just as Spivak's discussion of the remedial English class in New York supplements her discussion of the sanctioned ignorance of the "New Immigrant" intellectual with a focus on the critical agency of migrant underclass, her reflections on the production of Ali as an idealized "illiterate third world woman" also highlights the agency of the other woman that cannot be acknowledged by benevolent elite feminists.

In her published work after *Critique*, Spivak moves away from defining transnational literacy exclusively as a practice of reading and writing that enables upwardly mobile diasporic female students to unlearn their ignorance of geopolitics or, as Spivak (1990) famously put it, to "unlearn [their] privilege as loss" (9). She (2004a) instead begins to define transnational literacy as a crucial aspect of a new humanities

education that involves "learning to learn from below": an education that provides an antidote to the failure of teachers and students "at this end of the spectrum" to learn from the other (127). This change in Spivak's (2000) description of transnational literacy was motivated by what she saw as the "narcissism" of unlearning privilege (121) – which reduces politics to the process of critical self-reflection – and by her increasing concern with ethics as responsibility to the other (Chakravorty et al. 2006).[126] As Spivak (1998) writes, the encounter with the other should raise the question "not merely who am I? but who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me?" (207; Ray 2009, 117). Spivak's redefinition of transnational literacy as a "learning to learn from below" is significant for several reasons. First, it recalls Freire's insight that a pedagogy of the oppressed must start from the lived experience and knowledge of the oppressed; it is not a gift bestowed from above, but must be forged with the oppressed. Second, Spivak supplements Freire's claim that the educator must "learn from below" – a claim that, as Ilan Kapoor (2008) notes, has become axiomatic not only in critical pedagogy circles, but in development studies and practice as well – with the caveat that one must "learn to learn." This implies that learning from below requires a prior learning in how to ethically relate to and listen to the other (Kapoor 2008). For Spivak (2002b), the humanities has a unique role in this process of "learning to learn" since it can develop in students the capacity "to imagine the other who does not resemble the self" through a training in literary reading that approaches the other's texts with respect (23). This is a "a training not only in accessing the other so well that probable action can be prefigured but striving

[126] See also Ray (2009) for a discussion of this shift.

for a response from the distant other without guarantees" (Spivak 2002a, 125). While the results of such humanities education are not directly ascertainable by either the teacher or the student, Spivak (1995a) argues that this method of literary reading allows students to "to sense that the other is not just a voice, but that the other produces texts even as they, like us, are written in and by a text not of our own making" (13; Sanders 2006, 4). In other words, it shifts the focus of literary reading toward the "imagined agency of the other," a focus that is missing from her earlier work on transnational literacy and that resonates with Freire's attention to the agency of the oppressed (Spivak 2004b, 541).

While Spivak explicitly discusses this process of "learning to learn from below" only in her most recent work, much of her oeuvre since the 1980s has been motivated by a similar desire to learn to listen and respond to the voice of the other in ways that do not reduce otherness to ready-made categories or scripts.[127] This desire is especially apparent in "Can the Subaltern Speak?," which explores the difficulty of learning to hear the voice of the subaltern woman: a subject blocked from "social lines of mobility" and thus from the ability to form a "recognisable basis of action" (Spivak 2005, 476). As I already noted, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" offers an important critique of the politics of representation, and calls upon intellectuals (such as Foucault and Deleuze) to account for their own role in re-presenting the oppressed, both semiotically and politically. But this essay is also significant because it outlines Spivak's critique of the South Asian Subaltern Studies collective. Subaltern Studies began as an attempt to recover the histories of the

[127] However, as Spivak notes her interview with Tani Barlow, while this ethical turn has been central to most of her work since the 1980s, and was explicitly outlined in "Claiming Transformation" (Spivak 2000), it has been frequently overlooked by commentators (Chakravorty et al. 2006; Ray 2009).

subaltern or peasant insurgency that had been excluded from both British colonial and bourgeois nationalist historiography (Morton 2003, 2007). While Spivak sympathizes with the desire of the Subaltern Studies to tell the history of Indian colonization and decolonization otherwise, she nevertheless warns against positing a homogenous identity of the subaltern that occludes the heterogeneity of subaltern groups in general and of subaltern women in particular (Morton 2003, 2007; Ray 2009). Indeed, Spivak argues that subaltern women's histories are generally missing from Subaltern studies not solely because of the masculinist myopia of the field, but because the archives themselves rendered subaltern women invisible and unintelligible.

In particular, Spivak (1988) explores to the issue of the British criminalization of *sati* – or widow burning – in colonial India. She suggests that the colonial archives "doubly efface" the subaltern woman: while the imperialists constructed her as victim in need of protection from "brown men," the patriarchal discourses of Indian nationalism asserted that "the women actually wanted to die" and thereby celebrated the widow as a valiant defender of a besieged culture (297). In both imperialist and nationalist discourses, women appear merely as objects to be saved by the British or sacrificed in the name of Indian nationalism. Spivak (1988) therefore contends that nowhere in the archives does one encounter "the testimony of women's voice-consciousness" that while not "ideology-transcendent or "fully" subjective…would have constituted the ingredients for producing a countersentence" (297). She concludes her essay with the claim that, within British and nationalist archives on sati, the subaltern woman cannot speak.

Spivak's (1988) thesis that the subaltern woman cannot speak has been the subject of much debate in the decades following the essay's publication (Sanders 2006). It therefore requires careful unpacking. As Lata Mani (1998) notes, Spivak's final position "raises as many questions as it does answers":

> In claiming that 'the subaltern cannot speak,' does Spivak mean 'cannot' as in 'does not know how to' or 'cannot' in the sense of 'is unable to under the circumstances'? Further, is there a slippage between noting, as she does, that the female subaltern *does* not speak in police records of the East Indian Company, and in concluding from that the 'subaltern cannot speak' at all, in any voice, however refracted? (159, *italics in original*).

In response to what she perceives as the limitations of Spivak's essay, Mani works to unearth the widow's testimony in the archives, and to thereby "reconstruct woman as subject, to restore to the center the traces of [her] active suffering, resistance, and coercion" (191). This prompts her to suggest that postcolonial studies should be organized, not around the question "Can the subaltern speak?," but rather the question "Can she be *heard* to be speaking in a given set of materials?" (191, *my emphasis*). This shift of focus is important because I believe that it more accurately reflects the concerns that originally motivated Spivak's inquiry into the subaltern's voice. In contrast to Mani (1998), I read Spivak's conclusion that "the subaltern cannot speak" not as a claim that subaltern women are always and everywhere mute. I instead take her to be suggesting that under the conditions of imperialism and patriarchal nationalism the subjectivity and agency of subaltern women are effaced because there is no position within these

discourses from which they could speak and their speech acts be recognized. In other words, while the subaltern woman may speak, this speech act is unlikely to register in dominant discursive spaces of colonial historiography and nationalist insurgency unless it bolsters "the ideological construction of gender that keeps the male dominant" or, put differently, positions women solely as objects of male control (Spivak 1988, 283).

Spivak makes this point most forcefully in her discussion, in the final paragraphs of "Can the Subaltern Speak?," where she turns to the suicide of Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, a young Bengali woman involved in the struggle for Indian independence in 1926. Spivak suggests Bhuvaneswari hung herself after she failed to carry out a political assassination with which she had been entrusted. Reading the young woman's body as a text, as a site of inscription, Spivak points to how Bhuvaneswari killed herself while menstruating. She thereby reversed the customary practice of sati-suicide, which prohibited a menstruating widow from immolating herself. Spivak proposes that, through this reversal, Bhuvaneswari sought to ensure that her suicide would not be read as response to an unwanted pregnancy. Yet, despite her attempt to rewrite the hetero-patriarchical scripting of the female body as exclusively tied to reproduction, Bhuvanewari's relatives still interpreted her suicide as a "case of illicit love" (Spivak 1988, 308). Hence, as Spivak (1990) explains in a later interview, when she wrote that "the subaltern cannot speak" she was pointing to the fact "that even when, whether showing her political impotence or her political power, [the subaltern woman] tries to speak and make it clear, so that it would be read one way, the women in the family – radical women – decide to forget it" (89). Spivak's account of the failure of Bhuvanewari to be heard in "Can the Subaltern Speak"

therefore resembles her critiques of the failure of the diasporic teacher in the English class at CUNY to hear her student's interpretations as valid and of the feminist audience of "Rifts of Silence" to hear the "gypsy woman" as anything other than an "illiterate Third World woman." In all three cases, the subaltern "spoke, but women did not, do not, 'hear' her" (Spivak 1999a, 247).

In *Critique*, Spivak (1999a) suggests that her earlier statement that "the subaltern cannot speak" was an "inadvisable remark" prompted by her despair over the fact that subaltern women's own testimonies could not achieve any public reception, unless filtered through the conceptual terrain mapped by hetero-patriarchal discourses (308). Hence, while some postcolonial scholars influenced by Derridian deconstruction, such as Amit Rai (1998), read Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" as pointing to the untranslatability of subaltern speech and thus to the limits of representation, I take her to be saying something slightly different. Rather than solely highlighting the incommensurability and undecidability of subaltern speech, I suggest that Spivak is also pointing to a particular social and political dynamic not fully accounted for by the method of deconstruction: namely, the hierarchal structures of legitimation that determine whether the speech acts of marginal subjects can be heard within dominant discourses. In a more recent article, Spivak (2005) further clarifies her views on this matter. She suggests that subaltern women's voices fail to attain assent because they are denied any institutional validation that would allow for their interests to count; they therefore are unable "to have what they are saying and doing recognized as such" (477). Spivak suggests that her attempt to re-read Bhuvaneswari's suicide as a political act illustrates

that the subaltern woman can speak, but that such speech acts require a receptive audience if they are to be heard and acknowledged. As Spivak (2002b) puts it, "there must be a presumed collectivity of listening and countersigning subjects and agents in the public sphere for the subaltern to 'speak'" (24).

"Can the Subaltern Speak" anticipates much of Spivak's recent writings on "learning to learn from below." Indeed, in the afterword to *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (a collection of essays by various scholars on Spivak's famous essay), Spivak (2010a) argues that her attempt to read Bhuvanewari's suicide outside the heterosexual romance narrative, and thus to learn to hear the subaltern speak even when dominant discourses foreclose this possibility, inspired both her theory of transnational literacy and her involvement in teacher-training in schools for the rural poor in India. On the one hand, the failure of Bhuvanewari's female relatives to read her suicide as a text of political resistance, and the fact that Bhuvanewari's "elder sister's eldest daughter's eldest daughter's eldest daughter" is a new U.S. immigrant who was recently promoted to position in a transnational corporation, prompted Spivak to develop her account of transnational literacy (Spivak 1999a, 310). On the other hand, Spivak's attempt to learn to learn from the subaltern led her, since the early 1990s, to work with subaltern literacy campaigns for the *adivasis*, a word commonly used for diverse and heterogeneous "tribal" communities in rural India who have been left out of the bourgeois nationalist struggle. It is to these campaigns for subaltern literacy that I now turn.

III. Subaltern Literacy

Despite her decade-long involvement with literacy campaigns for the rural poor, Spivak only started writing about her experiences as a teacher in rural schools in 2004. Her most thorough discussion of these campaigns is in "Human Rights, Human Wrongs." As I mentioned above, this article offers a critique of human rights and global citizenship education "at this end of the spectrum" that trains Western students to be dispensers of human rights to those who they believe cannot help themselves, and thus reproduces "class apartheid" between the dispensers and receivers of human rights (Spivak 2004b, 529). However, Spivak is equally concerned in this article to explore how we might transform such unequal relations such that those who are wronged will no longer require help from above. Just as Freire suggests that literacy education can become a means of developing a critical consciousness amongst the oppressed of the causes of their oppression and the possibilities for collective action to transform such oppressive conditions, Spivak also turns to literacy education as a mode of developing a form of collective agency amongst the subaltern in general, and subaltern girls and women in particular. And for Spivak (2004a), as for Freire, such a task requires radically transforming literacy education at "the other end" of the spectrum (128).

If Spivak's account of transnational literacy is disruptive of metropolitan education, her work on subaltern literacy challenges the rote learning and memorization that characterizes schools for the rural poor and that prepares them solely for menial labour. Echoing (though not explicitly referencing) Freire's critique of "banking education," Spivak argues that such education reproduces "class apartheid" by deskilling

students and thus by training the subaltern to accept their oppression as the norm; as Spivak (2010a) notes, "schools for the subaltern make sure that the subaltern will not be heard except as beggars" (229). In other words, these schools ensure the continued exclusion of the subaltern from the public sphere – an exclusion that for subaltern women, as we have seen above, is a result both of the legacies of colonization and the continuation of class-caste-gender hierarchies within India after decolonization.[128] These schools therefore create a group of people who will always be positioned as wronged victims who require saving from middle class intellectuals.

For Spivak (2004b), rural literacy projects can undo the division between those who right wrongs and those who are wronged victims only if they enable the subaltern to begin to recognize themselves as a collectivity – as what Marx (1978c) called a class-for-itself or Gramsci (1971) called a counter-hegemonic force – that can enter and make demands upon the public sphere and have their voices heard by the state. This necessitates more than just providing school rooms, teachers, and textbooks for the rural poor, in particular for rural girls and women. It also requires that the very teachers who emerged from the system of rote learning characteristic of rural education be re-trained in pedagogical strategies that promote active learning for comprehension and critical consciousness (Sanders 2006; Ray 2009). In so doing, they must learn to challenge long-standing relations and hierarchies of class-caste- and gender power that prevent the subaltern woman from speaking and having her voice heard.

[128] For a discussion of how the subaltern woman provides the reproductive labour necessary for the newly decolonized nation, yet nevertheless remains excluded from its democratic promises, see Spivak's (1998) comments on Devi's "The Breast Giver."

Spivak (2004b) (like Freire before her) claims that this transformation from subalternity to counter-hegemony cannot be gift given to students from human rights workers or international feminists, such as Nussbaum, for whom "my way is the best" (fn. 16, 568).[129] As Spivak argues, if the task of critical literacy education is to undo "class apartheid" – to enable the subaltern to right their own wrongs rather than be treated as objects of charity and aid from above – it must be cultivated with the oppressed. It must undo the division between mental and manual labour.

Spivak's account of subaltern literacy thus has much in common with Freire's model of dialogic education: both view literacy as a mode of reading and writing the word and the world that can politicize students only when it enables the "oppressed" and "subaltern" to become political actors and agents, not only of their own knowledge, but also of democratic struggles to transform "class apartheid." Yet, while Spivak follows Freire in suggesting that this task requires the teacher to learn to learn *from* the subaltern, she takes more seriously than Freire the teacher's obligation to learn the indigenous systems of knowledge and collective responsibility-based ethics of the students she encounters in the classroom. For Spivak, transformative education requires more than what she calls the "quick-fix" of human rights education or Freire's project of consciousness-raising (532). Rather, it necessitates that the teacher "suture" the liberal conception of human rights and the Marxist concept of class consciousness to the

[129] As Spivak (2004b) notes, Nussbaum's approach to subaltern literacy is premised on the asymmetry between those who right wrongs and those who are wronged. In so doing, it treats the subaltern merely as a case study that the international feminist uses to justify her universalist theory. At the same time, Spivak argues that while Nussbaum "believes in the 'value' of 'education' and 'literacy'," these are "contentless words for her" (567). For Spivak, Nussbaum never addresses questions of pedagogy: of how teaching and learning might subvert the disenfranchisement of the subaltern.

traditions of indigenous groups (534, 538). These "dormant" indigenous systems of knowledge, Spivak argues, have been delegitimized, not because they are pre-capitalist and pre-modern, but because they are useless to, and threaten, the logic of capitalist accumulation (544). As I discuss in more detail below, Spivak argues that their visions of collective responsibility thus provide useful resources for counter-hegemonic struggles aimed at challenging global capitalism and renewing international socialism for the present-day.

Learning to learn from this "delegitimized" ethical imperative can occur, according to Spivak, only through the "hands-on, labour-intensive work" of teaching the rural poor: "Teaching is my solution, the method is pedagogic attention, to learn the weave of the torn fabric in unexpected ways, in order to suture the two [indigenous traditions and the practice of radical democracy], not altering gender politics from above" (545, 548). For Spivak, this pedagogical method requires that the teacher trainer and/or the teacher learn the languages and idioms of their students. Just as Spivak grants a greater role than Freire to indigenous systems of knowledge in her account of decolonizing literacies, she also places more emphasis than Freire on the need for teachers to teach in the mother tongue of their students. For Spivak (2002b), such teaching in and of indigenous languages is important, not only because it promotes greater comprehension of the curriculum, but also because it is "an important step toward fostering the habit of freedom—the habit of finding a meaning for oneself" rather than merely accepting lessons from caste-class superiors without question (29).

At the same time, Spivak (2010b) pays more attention than Freire to the role of what she calls the "oral-formulaic" in indigenous cultures. While Freire challenges the literacy/orality binary at the heart of colonial knowledge production by emphasizing the role of dialogue and reading the world to the process of learning to "read the word," Spivak more explicitly problematizes the Great Divide theory of literacy/orality promoted by Ong's sociolinguistics. As I suggested in Chapter Two, Ong offers an account of oral cultures as traditional and conservative, uniform and unchanging; their modes of oral storytelling and knowledge transmission, he claims, rest on the repetition of existing formula and thus prevent the creation and invention that literacy permits and modernity requires. Writing about the "oral-formulaic" songs of the Sabar women – the indigenous women that she has trained as teachers for rural schools – Spivak shows that the oral cultures of these women are, *contra* Ong, creative and inventive. While their songs draw from existing formulas, they "appropriate all sorts of material" – including pre-colonial idioms and more "modern" ones (29); in so doing, these women not only maintain an archive of pre-colonial traditions, but also transform such traditions for the present-day. For Spivak, these oral cultures are not what literacy education should aim to overcome. Rather, the "principle of inventive equivalence" that they embody offers a lesson in what a form of literacy education that does not take Western alphabetic literacy as its norm might entail (30).

Furthermore, Spivak's (2004b) approach to "subaltern literacy" highlights the necessity for educators to learn to learn not only the languages and oral cultures of their students, but to also pay attention to students' "unexpected" responses to teaching (537).

Rather than offer models for literacy education, Spivak instead calls teachers to develop a pedagogical method akin to Melanie Klein's approach to the psychoanalysis of children. Klein developed her psychoanalytic approach primarily through her clinical work with infants and very young children. Klein's technique involved listening carefully to children's symptoms (such as timidity, tantrums, nightmares, tics, and bed-wetting) as expressed in their dreams, play, and transference; she located in such elusive utterances and actions unconscious phantasies and affective states (depression, aggression, anxiety) that could not yet be spoken (Likierman 2002). Spivak does not discuss Klein's psychoanalysis of children in depth. But, she does suggest that nurturing a sense of political agency amongst the rural poor must begin by listening to and learning from students' responses to teaching. And just as the goal of psychoanalysis is to enable the analysand to make new meaning for him/herself from old psychic conflicts that repeat in the present, Spivak (2004b) suggests that transformative education can aspire only to "uncoercively rearrang[e] desires" (558) – a task that is never complete – and not to benevolently coerce assent to the teacher's desires for the students (537). For Spivak, such education is therefore an act of "love": an engagement that is that is "mind-changing on both sides" (1999a, 383) and that allows "non-hierarchical understanding to develop" (2003, 38).

As a consequence, while both Freire and Spivak propose that learning from below can occur only through love, Spivak is more attuned than Freire both to the teacher's inability to control the learning encounter – to ensure that education leads to self and social transformation – and to students' resistances to teaching – including their silence.

In “Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching,” Spivak (2002b) reflects on one educational encounter with two rural girls, aged eleven and fifteen, who had been asked by their teacher to memorize, without comprehending, a chapter in their textbook on Nelson Mandela’s struggle against apartheid in South Africa. Spivak recounts that when she attempted to explain apartheid and human rights to the girls, the students gave “no response to repeated careful questions” and instead faced her with an “inexorably closed look, jaws firmly set” (28). Spivak reads this silence, not as evidence of the students’ ignorance, but as an active withholding of the students, as a form of resistance to the teacher’s desire for the students’ response. Yet, four years later, when Spivak encountered one of the students in her high school class and mentioned to her the original lesson on Mandela, Spivak recalls that “a fleeting smile, no eye contact, passed across [her] face;” she interprets this smile as an “unverifiable” sign that something had gone through and that the caste-class hierarchy between Spivak (a caste-Indian) and the girl (an *adivasi*) had begun to break down (28). For Spivak, the girl’s “suggestive smile, directed by indirection and a shared experience,” in and of itself does not constitute transformative political action. But it is “an irreducible grounding condition” for an ethico-politics of decolonization (29).

This scene of teaching points to another significant difference between Freire and Spivak. While Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed is premised upon an intersubjective and reciprocal model of communicative action, in which teacher and student dialogue about and collectively transform relations of oppression, Spivak begins instead with the asymmetry and elusiveness of the encounter between teacher and student, self and other,

and of the disjointed relationship between ethics and politics. On the one hand, as I discussed above, Spivak draws attention to the hierarchal structures of legitimation that determine whether subaltern women's voices will be recognized and heard, structures that Freire does not discuss. On the other hand, Spivak rethinks education through Levinas's account of ethical responsibility for the other that calls the self to respond and his description of the heteronomy, singularity, and ineffability of the other (of the distance between the self and the other that is itself the condition for the possibility of any dialogue with or knowledge of the other). Following Levinas, Spivak (1995b) suggests that teaching, as an ethical relation to the other, is "not identical with the open exchange between radicals and the oppressed" (xxv; Ray 2009). For Spivak (2003), "one cannot access another directly" and thus there is always something in the exchange that remains untranslatable (29). As Sangeeta Ray (2009) explains, Spivak's account of teaching as an ethical relation is "an acknowledgement that the desire for a full ethical engagement is both enabled and limited by our recognition that not everything gets across, or can be made transparent" (92). Spivak thus offers a vision of education grounded in the face-to-face encounter, in which the teacher meets the student not as subject amongst subjects but as a singular other whose difference and alterity calls the teacher to respond (Sanders 2006; Ray 2009).[130] In *Critique*, Spivak (1999a) calls this singularity the other's "secret" (384). In her pedagogical writings, she refers to this singularity to highlight the impossibility of education.[131] Rural literacy programs can attempt to challenge the

[130] See Todd (2003) for a discussion of Levinas and education.
[131] As Ray (2009) notes, ethics is "an experience of the impossible" (94). See Britzman (2009) for a discussion of education as an "impossible profession."

exclusion of the subaltern from the public sphere and to foster a collective agency amongst the subaltern. However, they cannot provide a blueprint for change since they always exist only in and through the encounter with the irreducible difference of the student as other.

Spivak (2002b) thus outlines a Levinasian reading of education as ethical encounter with the alterity of the other, which she suggests constitutes an event irreducible to epistemology or politics. In so doing, she distances her pedagogy both from Nussbaum's capabilities approach – which views the subaltern women's life as an object of "information retrieval" that is fully accessible to the Western feminist (Spivak 1999a, 9) – and from Freire's vision of dialogical action in education – which too often presumes that communication between teacher and student can be made transparent and equal. Spivak reminds us that dialogue, if it is to form the basis of a pedagogy of the oppressed, must be understood as an encounter in which the other is never completely accessible to the self (Ray 2009). Such an acknowledgement does not foreclose the possibility of politics; rather Spivak argues that it can provide a different lens for thinking about decolonizing pedagogy as revolutionary praxis.

In contrast to Freire's vision of collective unity and cooperation or communion between leaders and the masses as the foundation of decolonization, Spivak uses Levinas's language of the non-reciprocity, heteronomy, and alterity of the other to reconceptualize decolonization as a form of politics that is takes as its departure point, not the symmetry between subjects (as Freire does), but rather the difference and alterity of the other before the self. Just as Levinas (1969) moves away from Buber's I-Thou

encounter toward a conception of "collectivity that is not a communion [but] is the face to face without intermediary" (93-34) – or as Derrida (1978) puts it, an encounter that is neither "mediate nor immediate" (90) – Spivak's develops within her pedagogical writings a post-identitarian model of political collectivity: one that begins with the diversity within any collective (Lynes 2012).

For Spivak (2003), this model of collectivity in diversity challenges the friend/enemy distinction at the heart of the civilizational logic of the new imperialism, which operates as a form of identity politics that treats cultures as distinct and self-contained. In contrast to such Manichaeism, Spivak calls for the development of political collectives that recognize the diversity within any unity (cultural, national, or political). Such attention to difference, Spivak argues, also provides an important counterpoint to the "logofratrocentric notion of collectivity" that undergirds anti-colonial struggles (32) – which takes male experience of colonization and decolonization as the norm – and the "single issue" gender politics that characterizes liberal feminist internationalism (39) – which "flattens out" the "myriad specificities of women's histories" by focusing exclusively on the patriarchal oppression of women in "traditional societies" so that they can be rescued into capitalist modernity and made "like us" (Western women) (46, 49). Echoing her previous work on strategic essentialism, Spivak argues that international feminism must sometimes appeal to an universalized and essentialist concept of "woman" in order to make demands for recognition and redistribution on nation-states and international institutions. Yet, she suggests that such universal claims are insufficient for developing the kinds of "textured collectivities" necessary to cultivate "multiple issue

gender justice" globally (46, 39): collectivities that acknowledge the diversity of gendered experiences and that challenge the tradition/modernity distinction by taking seriously the plurality of feminisms within and outside the "West" (65). For Spivak, the goal of a decolonizing transnational feminism must be to work, without guarantees or certainties, towards such cross-border collectivities "to come" (32; Lynes 2012).

In *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak (2003) reconceptualizes transnational feminism as a form of "planetarity" (71). Spivak never offers a specific definition of "planetarity."[132] However, she argues that, in contrast to the term globalization – which has come to be associated exclusively with neo-liberal global capitalism's attempt to marketize all forms of life through economic and political coercion – the planet cannot be approached as an object of financial or military control. The planet is instead "in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan" (72). For Spivak, the planet is therefore best understood as akin to Levinas's account of the other or what he calls "infinity." The planet, like Levinas's (1969) "infinity," is an idea whose "ideatum surpasses its idea" (49). Put differently, just as Levinas suggests that it is impossible to have an adequate idea of the infinite, that the idea of infinity is always overflowed by its content, Spivak proposes that it is a property of the planet that it exceeds all attempts to capture it in thought and thus to know and control it. While both Levinas and Spivak hold that all knowledge is non-adequate to the object of knowledge, their point is that the ideas of "infinity" and the "planet" are exceptional because the "distance that separates ideatum and idea…constitutes the content of the ideatum itself"

[132] See Brydon (2011) for a discussion of Spivak's work on planetarity.

(Levinas 1969, 49). Infinity and the planet are therefore not representations of something. They are rather what Levinas calls alterity or the otherness of the other that surpasses all knowledge and from which my responsibility derives (Spivak 2013).

For Spivak (2003), planetarity is useful to decolonizing projects not so much because it points to human custodianship over the resources of the planet (Brydon 2011). Rather, its significance lies in how it renders "our home uncanny," or how it defamiliarizes the familiar space of the earth and, in doing so, problematizes the myth of human exceptionalism that undergirds our attempt to control non-human nature (Spivak 2003, 73). Indeed, Spivak's idea of the "planet" as alterity offers an important counterpoint to the anthropocentrism and speciesism at the heart of Freire's theory of critical literacy, in which the animal functions as the negative other of the human. For Spivak, the "(non-) place of the planet" – which is both "above and beyond our own reach" – is neither continuous nor discontinuous with the "human" (Spivak 2011, 101; 2003, 73). The "planet" is instead the other and our relation to this other is best understood as an ethical relation that maintains the difference and distance between the self and the other and that calls into question the self's desire to know and possess the other. As Spivak (2013) puts it: "If we imagine ourselves as planetary accidents rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away" (339).

For Spivak (1999a), this idea of the planet as alterity is most evident in what she calls "global-girdling movements" for global ecological justice that are rooted in

indigenous and subaltern animist liberation theologies (381). Within such subaltern theologies, non-human nature figures not as what must be overcome in order for the human to assume political freedom (as it does in Freire), but instead as the other of the human community to which we are bound by the structure of ethical and collective responsibility (Spivak 2013). For Spivak decolonizing struggles can overcome the literacy/orality, modernity/tradition, and human/infrahuman distinction at the heart of colonial, neo-imperial, and international feminist approaches to literacy only by "learning to learn" from these pre-capitalist indigenous systems of knowledge and ethics how to "develop a post-capitalist structure" that is "filled in with the more robust imperative to responsibility which capitalist social productivity was obliged to destroy" (Spivak 2004b, 533). Spivak (2003) suggests that such indigenous ethical traditions and their conception of non-human nature can therefore offer lessons on how to achieve such a post-capitalist imaginary to feminists interested in building cross-border collectivities that are grounded not in sameness but in the alterity of the other that exists prior to any dialogue, communication, or politics. These systems offer a way to imagine political collectivities oriented toward the other: not only to Levinas's (1969) figures to "the stranger, the widow, and the orphan" (77) but to the "illiterate," non-human nature, and the planet as well.

IV. Conclusion

Just as Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed reclaims literacy from its colonial legacies and transforms the unequal relations of intellectual labour that position the "illiterate" as an ignorant and passive victim, Spivak's post-structuralist Marxist feminist-inspired

accounts of transnational literacy and subaltern literacy also offer models of decolonizing literacy that disrupt the coloniality of literacy and deconstruct the distinctions between the literate and the illiterate, and the literate and the oral. Her approach to transnational literacy emphasizes the "mortal illiteracy" of tertiary-level diasporic students, whose sanctioned ignorance of geopolitics renders them complicit with the recolonization of postcolonial states; her account of subaltern literacy, in contrast, begins with the delegitimized ethical traditions of indigenous cultures, from which the Western interventionist academic can learn to learn in order to build heterogeneous planetary collectives with the subaltern. Spivak's work offers important rejoinders to second- and third-wave international liberal feminisms – which are predicated on the continuing divide between those who right wrongs and those who are wronged. It also serves as a corrective to the masculinism and speciesism implicit in Freire's model of revolutionary action. As Spivak demonstrates, decolonizing literacies can undo "class apartheid" between mental and manual labour only by challenging the complicity of "single issue" feminist politics with the new imperialism and by developing feminist cross-border collectivities that, unlike Freire's vision of revolutionary decolonizing struggle, take as their departure point the heterogeneity of subaltern experiences and the alterity of non-human nature.

Yet, despite these differences, taken together, Freire and Spivak reveal that a feminist politics of decolonizing literacies must affirm the epistemic agency of the subaltern, and begin with the oppressed and subaltern as producers of knowledge and political agents from whom the educator must learn how to learn. Within their works,

those deemed functionally "illiterate" become the teachers and literacy is transformed into a problem not only of and for the oppressed, but also for the privileged teacher who must also learn to read her own location within global relations of power and privilege so as not to repeat the hierarchical relations between saviour and saved, teacher and student endemic both to the coloniality of literacy and international liberal feminism. Both demonstrate that this learning to learn with and from the oppressed is the necessary condition for developing political imaginaries and pedagogies of hope and transformation that move beyond the necropolitics of empire and open up the possibilities in the present-day for building alternatives structures of political community grounded in diversity, collective responsibility, and love.

CONCLUSION

TOWARD FEMINIST LITERACIES OF DECOLONIZATION

In an adult literacy classroom in the Lower East Side of New York, Lali, the protagonist of Nicholas' Mohr's (1985) short story "The English Lesson," receives her first lesson in English literacy. After requiring students in a night class composed of an ethnically-mixed group of migrants to write short self-introductory statements, the volunteer literacy teacher, Mrs. Susan Hamma, asks each student to read the assignment to the class. Her instructions are clear. The students are not only to demonstrate what they learnt in the previous classes, but to say why they are taking the course and, she insists, to "keep it brief" because "everyone must have a chance": "This is, after all a democracy, and we have a democratic class; fairness for all!" (50). The teacher's espousal of the democratic principle is, however, mitigated by the "pleasing thrill" she experiences when she chooses students to speak at random and thus can watch them flounder (55). As students are called upon, each nervously tells a similar story: each has enrolled in the course to learn to read English, get a better job, help their families, and obtain U.S. citizenship. Lali, a young Puerto Rican woman who migrated to the U.S. with her older husband, repeats the same narrative: she is attending the English lessons so that she can help at her husband's restaurant and "do more for [her]self, including to be able to read better in English" (58). Taken together, the students' statements bolster Mrs. Hamma's belief that "that this small group of people desperately need her services" to "improve their conditions," "work their way up," and become citizens that are "a credit to this country" (51).

Inside the classroom the students obediently follow the script that the benevolent Mrs. Hamma has laid out for them – that their desire to become literate must be tied to the desire to have a better future in the U.S. and accompanied by a sense of gratitude both for the English lessons and for their acceptance into the democratic U.S. Yet, outside the classroom, Lali and her Puerto Rican co-worker and fellow student, William, mock Mrs. Hamma's benevolence, troubling the implicit assumption that her literacy classes will ensure their success in the U.S. After the last class of the semester, as Lali and William walk to Lali's husband's restaurant to start their night shift, William mimics Mrs. Hamma, and in a fit of laughter teases Lali: "I would like to say to you how wonderful you are, and how you gonna have the most fabulous future...after all, you so ambitious…after all, you are now a member in good standing…of the promised future!" (72).

This dissertation began by reflecting on a writing lesson at what Spivak calls "the other end" of the spectrum – in the literacy schools established in Afghanistan and Pakistan for girls and women by the humanitarian Greg Mortenson. It ends with another writing lesson, only this time "at this end" in a literacy class for migrants to New York. In both scenes of teaching, literacy is construed by the Western teacher as a salvific force that can rescue non-Western students into modernity (in the case of the Afghan girls and women Mortenson sought to help) and the promise of upward class mobility (in the case of the migrants enrolled in Mrs. Hamma's class). And, in both, the teachers envision themselves not only as the rescuers of, but also as superior to their students, whom they view as unable to help themselves. Just as literacy is deployed within the neo-imperial,

colonial, and international feminist projects outlined in this dissertation to demarcate the modern from the traditional, the human from the infrahuman, the teachers in these stories also posit literacy as the dividing line permanently separating teacher and student. No matter how hard-working and ambitious the students, they always lag behind the Western teacher's expertise and knowledge.

Yet, while what I have called the "coloniality of literacy" informs the two writing lessons that book-end this dissertation, Mohr's short story troubles the long-standing colonial belief in literacy as salvation in important ways. Mohr reveals that Mrs. Hamma's desire to do-good *and* the secret pleasure she gets by keeping her students in state of fear both originate in the impulse to control the learning encounter. In so doing, Mohr highlights the ambivalence between love and hate that structures, not only Mrs. Hamma's benevolence, but all rescue fantasies: the rescuer simultaneously loves the helplessness of the victim, since this passivity shores up the superiority of and necessity for the rescuer, and hates the victim precisely because s/he requires assistance and protection. Mohr thus reminds us that the rescuer, despite good intentions, might be as aggressive and intrusive as "the beast": both the valiant rescuer and the beastly villain necessitate the presence of a passive, agentless victim; neither are concerned with the interests or intentions of those they seek to rescue or violate (Berman 2003).

At the same time, Mohr points to those moments when supposedly passive and helpless "illiterate" migrants resist the rescue fantasies that posit them exclusively as victims who, through the gift of literacy, can be transformed into entrepreneurial neo-liberal subjects of success. Commenting on the fact that one university-educated Polish

student in the night class can only find work as a porter in the U.S., Lali tells William: "it's like Mrs. Hamma said, this is America, right? So…everybody got a chance to clean toilets!" (Mohr 1985, 64). In so doing, Lali challenges the conventional wisdom that literacy provides the path from poverty to prosperity. She also problematizes those discourses of Western exceptionalism that, as we have seen, undergird both neo-imperial and international feminist approaches to literacy and that divide the world into two sex/gender orders: one that is post-feminist, post-racial, liberal, modern, and Western – where equality is achieved – and another that is anti-feminist, illiberal, traditional, and non-Western. Lali reveals the continuing structures of inequality at the heart of the "post-feminist" and "post-racial" West that force migrant workers such as herself into what Spivak (1999a) calls a "state of desperate choice or chance" (401).

Lali's resistance to Mrs. Hamma's rescue fantasy can be read as a nascent form of transnational literacy from below: one that critically interrogates the situation of political and economic insecurity produced by neo-liberal capitalism for new migrants, and is rooted in the knowledge that such migrants have accrued from their daily struggles for survival in their new "homes." Moreover, while Lali resists the teacher's desires, her attendance at the English lessons is motivated by other desires: her wish to spend more time with William (her love interest) and to leave, at least for one night a week, "the world of Rudi [her husband], the luncheonette, that street, everything that she felt imprisoned her" (67). As Mohr writes, Lali "was accomplishing something by herself, and without the help of the man she was dependent upon" (67). Neither victim nor hero, Lali negotiates the structures of heteropatriarchy, capitalism, and racism that shape her

experience in the U.S., finding in the adult literacy classroom not salvation but a space to begin to articulate her own erotic, political, and pedagogical desires. However, it is precisely these desires and complex agency that Mrs. Hamma cannot recognize, and which she must ignore to ensure the legitimacy of her position as teacher and maintain her fantasy of control.

Decolonizing Literacies has traced a similar disavowal of the agency of the "illiterate" within neo-imperial, colonial, and international feminist discourses. As I have shown, narratives of the literacy crisis of Afghan women occupy a central position in the neo-imperial imaginary because they produce for Western popular consumption the figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman." Tracing the mode of production of this figure within the neo-imperial imaginary, Chapter One demonstrated that Afghan women could appear on the West's agenda after 9/11 only to the extent that Afghan feminist struggles for literacy were changed into a "non-event" and Afghan women transformed from epistemic and political subjects into objects of imperial intervention. This process of desubjectification and objectification has been accomplished primarily through the pre-existing figure of the "illiterate Third world woman" as a passive, voiceless, and helpless victim of the third world patriarchy. If prior to 9/11 Afghan women's literacy crisis was silenced within the West because it was "barely covered by the mainstream media or even publicly discussed by policy makers" (Stabile and Kumar 2005, 765), neo-imperial narratives of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" that have circulated after 9/11 constitute another kind of silencing: an appropriation of Afghan feminism that excludes the women themselves from the

capacity to exercise their own ability to speak or to participate in decisions about their "liberation."

My analysis suggests that, although this figure has re-emerged as an object of concern and intervention in the post-9/11 era, neo-imperial narratives offer little insight into lives of Afghan women and instead operate primarily as a "screen" for other political interests (Khanna 2009, 64). Within the neo-imperial imaginary, the figure of "illiterate Third World woman" is deployed for several reasons: to transform the G.W.O.T. and Afghan war into a rescue mission; to produce the West as a post-feminist site of sexual and gender exceptionalism no longer in need of feminism and the East as site of gender oppression where feminism does not exist; to legitimate new neo-liberal norms of femininity in the West as exemplary of the gender freedom that all female subjects (regardless of sexuality, race, or nationality) should aspire to replicate; and to justify the restructuring of Afghanistan according to the neo-liberal dictates of Western governments and donor agencies, which seek to impose on Afghan women the same post-feminist gender norms they promote for Western women.

The figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" thus reveals the mutual imbrication of forms of cultural and economic dispossession in a new age of empire, and highlights the need for historians of the present to challenge the false disciplinary divisions between postcolonial cultural studies and studies of political economy, the humanities and the social sciences, that posit the cultural either as unrelated to or overdetermined by the economic. This study instead demonstrates that, in order to adequately explain and challenge the new imperialism, feminists must elaborate

alternative analytic approaches that foreground the centrality of racialized, gendered, and sexualized conceptual schema and discourses to the production and reproduction of capitalist imperialism.

Chapter Two traced the colonial legacies of neo-imperial narratives of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman." This history is crucial to our understanding of the present moment in two respects. First, neo-imperial narratives of Afghan women's literacy crisis recast and replay an older logic of coloniality that emerged with the Spanish colonization of the Americas and continues into the present: a logic in which Western alphabetic literacy is posited as a superior mode of communication to orality, and used to separate the human from the infrahuman, civilization from barbarism, and modernity from tradition. Second, as a tool of colonial domination, the literacy/orality division and the human/infrahuman division upon which its rests served simultaneously to justify the violence against and death of those classified as "oral" *and* to offer "oral" peoples the promise of entry into a common humanity with Europeans and salvation from their barbarity through literacy.

As I have shown, this promise of entry into humanity through literacy was not without its contradictions. As Tania Li (2007) puts it, "the will to improve" always existed "in tension with the right to rule" (14). The legitimation of colonial and racial rule relied upon claims about the absolute difference between colonizer and colonized, master and slave. However, the fact that entry into humanity was deemed possible through literacy destabilized such notions of absolute difference since it pointed to the possibility of a common humanity between ruler and ruled. It also rendered problematic the

abjection of those classified as "illiterate" from the realm of humanity: the promise of entry into humanity through literacy instruction presupposed the existence amongst these "illiterates" of the very epistemic, political, and moral agency denied them by colonial and racial discourses.[133] Yet, while this contradiction illustrates the illogic at the heart of the logic of coloniality, it is also what has helped to secure the success of imperial knowledge production both past and present, and enabled it to survive, recuperate, and renew itself whenever under siege (Copper and Stoler 1997). In other words, the promise of progress and transcendence of absolute cultural and racial difference through literacy offers legitimacy to the imperial-humanitarian mission, even as appeals to absolute difference makes this mission never-ending (Cooper and Stoler 1997). And just as the promise of salvation through literacy served historically to reinforce the distinction between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of the Americas, American citizens and chattel slaves, and the modern and traditional "man," in the twenty-first century the promise of rescuing Afghan women through literacy has similarly helped to legitimate the Afghan war and to ensure that these women are positioned in a relation of permanent subordination and trusteeship to their rescuers.

International liberal feminist approaches to third world women's literacy were the focus of Chapter Three. Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach and Deborah Ellis's *The Breadwinner* were selected in the interests of uncovering the complicity of both second- and third-wave inspired international feminisms with the coloniality of literacy. Nussbaum's second-wave feminism and Ellis's third-wave feminism differ in important

[133] My analysis of this dynamic is informed by Stoler (1995); Young (1995); Cooper and Stoler (1997); and Li (2007).

ways: Nussbaum appeals primarily to modern feminism's concern with suffering women, while Ellis deploys the post-feminist rhetoric of female empowerment and queer and trans discourses of "female masculinity." However, despite these differences, Nussbaum and Ellis render invisible the knowledge and desires of those deemed "illiterate" and the meaning of gender variance in non-Western locales. They instead re-install the figure of the "illiterate Third World Woman" as a helpless victim in need of rescue and counteractively construct the figure of the liberated and literate Western feminist as benevolent helper and unmarked norm in relation to which non-Western subjects should shape their lives. As a consequence, neither provides an adequate framework to challenge either gender-based violence in the global south or the post-feminist rhetoric of neo-liberal capitalist imperialism.

This dissertation therefore demonstrates that, within neo-imperial, colonial, and international feminist discourses, literacy is asked to accomplish both too much *and* too little. On the one hand, all three projects proffer literacy as salvation from ignorance, barbarity, heteropatriarchy, poverty, insecurity, and death, while also ignoring the role of war, militarism, structural violence, neoliberal capitalism, and contemporary practices of imperialism in producing and exacerbating the insecurity of the "illiterate." On the other hand, as I have shown, this conventional view of literacy as panacea is far too narrow: it is predicated on a minimalist and autonomous definition of literacy as a set of technical reading and writing skills that effaces the epistemic practices, subjectivities, and multiple literacies of the "illiterate Third World woman." Narratives of literacy as salvation, originating as they do in unequal social relations of knowledge production,

communication, and pedagogy, offer no space for subaltern subjects to express their own complex relationship to literacy.

It is in the interest of moving beyond such salvation narratives that I turned in Chapters Four and Five to the works of Paulo Freire and Gayatri Spivak. Both reveal that literacies of decolonization, if they are to challenge the coloniality of literacy, must begin with the epistemic and political agency of those classified as "illiterate" and deconstruct the divisions between literate/illiterate, teacher/student, knowledge/ignorance, and rescuer/rescued upon which the legitimacy of neo-imperial, colonial, and international feminist approaches to literacy depends. Freire's project of critical literacy as a pedagogy of the oppressed challenges dominant educational discourses that posit literacy as a gift to be bestowed on the "illiterate" by the benevolent teacher. Within Freire's oeuvre, students instead become the agents of their own learning and literacy is transformed from an instrument of domination that upholds unequal social relations between teacher and student into a critical practice of reading and writing the world and the world that can contribute to anti-colonial decolonizing struggles. As Freire reminds us, the ultimate goal of critical literacy education is not to integrate the oppressed into the existing cultural-politico-economic order that is the cause of their oppression. Critical literacy must instead work to socialize the means of intellectual production and to thereby open up possibilities for a future that is not simply a repetition of the present state of oppression. If this dissertation highlights some significant limitations of Freire's project of critical literacy – particularly his andro- and anthropo-centrism – it does so primarily in the interests of reinventing Freire for the present-moment.

Indeed, Freire's proposals for a critical reading and writing of the word and the world – proposals that explode the self-certainty of the present and hence the very notion of a fixed and once-and-for-all knowledge of the present and its possibilities – are very much needed today. We live in a time when, as Baudrillard reminds us, the simulated spectacle of war transforms every event into a "non-event" that resembles what happened before, and thereby reduces the present to nothing more than the repetition of the past; or, to put it differently, traps us in the eternal repetition of the present moment. This *déjà vu* not only renders the horrors and violence of war banal. It also ensures that the present is "experienced as Total, with no imagined elsewhere" (Brown 2005, 9). In contrast to this closure of history, Freire's project advances a pedagogy of hope and transformation that uncovers in each moment of the present the possibility that things could be otherwise. For Freire, critical literacy does not provide a vision of, or plan for, the future. Instead, the learning encounter that occurs in both the classroom and collective struggle is utopic and anticipatory: it offers an opening onto a radical futurity that cannot be planned in advance precisely because it must be made with, not granted to, oppressed peoples.

This openness toward the radical future – a future of unknown and multiple possibilities – also guides Spivak's theories of transnational literacy and subaltern literacy as modes of "learning to learn from below." This learning to learn requires that the teacher develop what Spivak (2002a) calls "a habit of literate reading, suspending oneself into the text of the other, for which the first condition and effect is a suspension of the conviction that I am necessarily better, I am necessarily indispensable, I am necessarily the one to right wrongs, I am necessarily the end product for which history

happens" (125). In other words, the teacher must both unlearn her privilege and learn to attend to the idioms and ethical traditions of the subaltern. Hence, although both Spivak and Nussbaum articulate a feminist theory of education centered on the suffering of the subaltern woman, there are important differences between their approaches. While Nussbaum posits the "illiterate Third World woman" as an object of violation in need of saving in order to shore up the self-certainty of the Western feminist as rescuer and of the Western liberal feminist project itself, Spivak's turn to the subaltern woman interrupts Nussbaum's rescue narrative. For Spivak, the learning encounter in the subaltern classroom throws into question the Western feminist demand to know and speak for the other. Spivak suggests that this questioning provides an opening within which the teacher can learn to listen for and learn from the response of the other.

Just as Freire problematizes the teacher/student hierarchy produced and reinforced within dominant approaches to literacy, Spivak challenges the paternalism undergirding Nussbaum's capabilities approach, in which the Western feminist is posited as the one to right the wrongs of suffering women. Spivak instead follows Freire in offering a model of literacy that begins with the unexpected response of students and with students as agents of their own knowledge and politics. At the same time, her attention to the radical singularity of the other, and thus to the inability of any educational encounter to ensure the transparency of communication between and among participants, demonstrates that Freire's quest for reciprocity is an (im)possible goal that always remains constrained by the prior asymmetry of the relation with the other.

As a critical genealogy of literacy's position in historic and early-twenty first century projects of colonization and decolonization, the main aim of this dissertation has been to highlight the necessity of developing an ethico-political approach to literacy that is simultaneously feminist and decolonizing. Such an approach must be feminist because gendered and sexualized discourses and power relations have been central to neo-imperial and colonial narratives of the "illiterate" as other. Neo-imperial narratives of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" are predicated on a heteropatriarchal and racialized politics that positions the U.S. as a white masculine protector and Afghan women as helpless, feminized victims in need of rescue from illiterate and "dangerous Muslim men." The colonial division between the literate and the oral also frequently appealed to gender and sexual difference to define the limits of the human. Moreover, as Maria Lugones (2007) points out, colonization itself produced a new modern/colonial sex/gender system that created multiple masculinities and femininities based on place and race. As we saw in Chapter One, within the colonial imaginary, the image of the sequestered Muslim woman was produced in opposition to the image of the Western bourgeois housewife who, in entering the marriage contract of her own volition, was construed as freely choosing her new subservient role. Chapter Two, on the other hand, showed how racial discourses of cannibalism and orality intersected with patriarchal discourses to produce indigenous peoples and African slaves as outside the bounds of gender altogether and to construct as normative binarist sex/gender arrangements predicated on a heteropatriarchal distribution of power. This differential production of feminine subject positions and sex/gender arrangements

continues in the present day, as the new imperialism juxtaposes the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" to the Western post-feminist subject of success – the "top girl" – and, in so doing, regulates the lives and desires of both groups of female subjects according to neo-liberal norms of governmentality.

To the extent that anti-colonial scholar-activists, such as Freire, fail to address the colonial modern sex/gender system, the project of decolonization they advance is incomplete – not simply because it ignores the experiences of women and those whose gender and sexual identity or practices fall outside the bounds of the Western sex/gender binary, but more significantly because it misses how colonialism and the processes of racialization are intertwined with gender and sexual difference and thus that decolonization must be informed by feminism. At the same time, if decolonizing struggles are to refuse the closure of identity and recognize the centrality of gender and sexual diversity to any political collectivity, they must challenge all binarist logics – not only male-female, masculine-feminine dichotomies, but also the human-animal dichotomy that posits the human as superior to the animal. As I have noted, decolonizing theories, like Freire's, that attempt to reclaim for the colonized the status of the human by reaffirming the inferiority of the animal often end up inadvertently reproducing rather than deconstructing the discourses of animalism that have been used to justify violence against those positioned on the threshold of, or evicted fully from, humanity. As Spivak's (2013) transnational feminist approach to the planet as other – as a "catachresis for inscribing collective responsibility as right" (341) – reveals, a robust vision of decolonizing literacies must move beyond the speciesist claim of human exceptionalism

that undergird racial, colonial, and capitalist projects of domination. It must instead link human freedom to the freedom of non-human nature, and develop a mode of critical literacy – a mode of reading and writing the word and the world – that is simultaneously an ethics of responsibility and obligation to the world that is our other.

At the same time, this dissertation has sought to demonstrate that any feminist project of literacy must be decolonizing. International feminist approaches to literacy, such as Nussbaum's capabilities approach and Ellis's *The Breadwinner*, that offer only a gender-based analysis of women's lives and locate the suffering of the "illiterate Third World woman" in traditional patriarchy (and its rigid sex/gender binary) alone fail to account for how structures of male supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and normative binary sex/gender orders are deeply imbricated in colonization, racialization, neo-liberalism, and global capitalism. Isolating heteropatriarchy from these multiple relations of power enables international feminists to advance an ahistorical analysis of gender oppression, to appropriate non-Western experiences of gender-variance as evidence of Western gender and sexual exceptionalism, to celebrate Western models of subjecthood and forms of resistance as normative, and to promote neoliberal global capitalism as the solution to gender inequalities. And, in so doing, it allows them to abdicate any responsibility for their own complicity with empire and neoliberalism.

While such complicity is not always intentional, it nevertheless reveals the limitations of any feminist ethico-politics not oriented toward a radical critique of the present (Jabri 2004; Halberstam 2011). As numerous anti-imperialist feminists have noted, genuine anti-racist transnational feminist solidarity requires feminists in the

"West" to critically interrogate their implication in imperial power relations, and to make this reflection an ongoing feature of their politics (Mohanty 2003; Alexander 2005; Russo 2006). As Meghana Nayak (2006) suggests, "in order for feminism to have resistance potential, it must acknowledge its own participation in Orientalism and its self-referential activism during colonialism, conflicts, and the War on Terror" (48). Yet, as this dissertation has suggested, it is not enough for Western feminists to solely account for how their frameworks repeat the logic of coloniality that positions benevolent Westerns as saviours of the passive "illiterate Third World woman"; they must equally interrogate how their "passionate attachment" to the politics of rescue stems from their melancholic wish to secure liberal feminism's own survival as a politically legitimate project in a post-feminist era (Butler 1997, 6). This melancholia is evident in both Nussbaum's turn to the victimized third world woman as the foundation of international liberal feminism and *The Breadwinner*'s celebration of the third world girl as post-feminist gender-crossing hero who overcomes the horrors of the Taliban regime and war through literacy.

Rather than repeat such melancholic politics, feminist literacies of decolonization need to move beyond the very division between hero and victim, power and powerlessness, undergirding both second- and third-wave international feminism. In other words, rather than cling to the lost unity of second-wave feminism or celebrate "empowerment" and capitalist entrepreneurship as solutions to inequitable gender arrangements, what must be worked through is the impulse within Western feminism to defend against vulnerability, to project helplessness and loss elsewhere rather than deal with our own losses and failures (see also Georgis 2008).

Here, feminism has much to learn from new theoretical interventions in queer theory that urge a move away from discourses of legitimation and normalization toward failure. As Halberstam (2011) notes in *The Queer Art of Failure*, queer and feminist struggles need to substitute a politics oriented toward success, reform, and progress with one that reframes failure, not as lack of success, but as a refusal of the capitalist equation of success with the accumulation of wealth and profit that undergirds neo-imperialist and neo-liberal projects. For Halberstam, when failure and loss are reframed as ways to refuse "to acquiesce to dominant logic of power and discipline" they open up opportunities for feminist and queer subjects to critique "the punishing norms that discipline behaviour and manage human development" and to instead find alternative ways of being that break with conventional ideas of success (88, 3).

Following Halberstam, I suggest that feminist literacies of decolonization must acknowledge the loss of political space for feminism precipitated by the ascendency of post-feminist discourse of Western gender and sexual exceptionalism, and make from this loss the basis of a new transnational feminist politics that connects what is happening "here" and "there." Instead of accommodating the post-feminist decree that the West is best for gender and sexual minorities, that the goal of feminism is to enable all people regardless of gender identity to enter the market and become the "breadwinner," and that feminism is needed here only as a commodity to be exported elsewhere, as do Nussbaum and *The Breadwinner*, we must instead uncover what Spivak (1998) refers to as "our common yet historically-specific lot" (153): those points of connection that are rendered

invisible within discourses that posit the West and East as mutually exclusive and irreconcilable sex/gender orders.

This requires drawing attention to how the post-feminist discourse of the West as a site of neo-liberal gender freedoms that all societies in the world should emulate serves to regulate not only the lives the "illiterate Third World woman" but also of female subjects in the West. While entrepreneurial "top girls" are celebrated in post-feminist, post-racial, and homonormative discourse as symbols of success, such success comes at a price: people in both the West and the non-West are increasingly required to remake themselves according to the neo-liberal model of the autonomous market-based citizen; eschew anti-racist, feminist, and queer politics; and assume responsibility for their own success or failure in the global economy. They are called upon, like Parvana, to become "the breadwinner." In contrast, poor people, brown and black people, migrants, and queer, trans, and gender-variant people who deviate from these new norms of successful post-feminist subjectivity by virtue of their class, racialized, and/or gendered social location are frequently labelled as failed citizens who are unable to self-discipline, and are presented as threats to the national body, defined as white, middle class, and normatively-gendered.[134] Cuts to literacy programming and welfare reform policies in Western nation-states seek to discipline these failed citizens into the model of the market citizen: a "childless flexible worker…available for extreme forms of exploitation" (Smith 2010, 2). At the same time, post-conflict reconstruction policies in Afghanistan promote literacy as a means by which Afghan women can be made responsible for their own

[134] See Roberts (1997); Silliman et al. (2002); Little (2003); Smith (2007); Flavin (2009); Smith (2010); and Spade (2011).

survival in a "post-" war context, while their "illiteracy" serves as a symbol of the need for permanent Western intervention. It is only by grappling with these differential forms of neo-liberal regulation that a feminist politics of decolonizing literacies can hope to challenge the imperial discourse of the West and the Rest and develop cross-border political solidarities grounded in the epistemic and political practices of those whom neoliberal global capitalism presents as failures (the "illiterate," the oppressed, and the subaltern).

To suggest that Western feminists must mourn our losses is not to render such losses equivalent to those experienced by Afghan women who bear the brunt of Western imperial violence. But it is to propose that feminist literacies of decolonization, if they are to disrupt the coloniality of literacy, require that Western feminists wrestle with our narcissistic fantasies of superiority and cultivate new forms of political subjectivity based on an ethical relation to loss and otherness. Such an ethical relation demands that Western feminists unlearn our privilege, criticize our complicity with neoliberal capitalist imperialism, and re-examine our own subjectivities, locations, and sanctioned ignorance or illiteracy. However, as both Freire and Spivak remind us, it also requires that we learn to attend to the other – to the "illiterate," the oppressed, the subaltern, and the planet.

My primary goal in this dissertation has been to highlight the multi-faceted ways in which this ethico-political project of attending to and working in solidarity with the other has been foreclosed within and by neo-imperial, colonial, and international feminist projects that approach literacy solely as a gift to be bestowed by benevolent Westerners on "illiterates" who are posited as infrahuman or inhuman others requiring salvation. By

offering a genealogy of this myth of literacy as salvation, I have sought to denaturalize it and to reveal it to be an historic construction that emerged, not with the G.W.O.T., but with the very advent of the modern/colonial project in the Spanish colonization of the Americas. Yet, while the purpose of such a genealogical investigation is to historicize the present and to thereby reveal "how we have been trapped in our own history," genealogy is not only an academic exercise (Foucault 2000a, 329). It is first and foremost a political one. Indeed, by striving to destabilize the naturalness or inevitability of the present, historians of the present also open up possibilities for acting differently within it.

In mapping the colonial legacies of neo-imperial and international feminist approaches to the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman," this dissertation opens up the possibility of re-encountering "illiterate" women from the perspective of what Mohanty (2003) calls "third world feminism" (17): a feminism that explores the specific articulations of colonialism, capitalism, gender, sexuality, and race in the lives of different groups of women in the "third world" and that thus offers geographically-, historically-, and culturally-grounded analyses so as to resist and challenge these multiple hegemonies. My aim in Chapter One was to show how the figure of the "illiterate Third World woman" has been deployed by the U.S. to turn the Afghan war into a rescue mission, to legitimize the post-feminist restructuring of U.S. feminist politics, and to restructure Afghanistan along neo-liberal lines. But I also pointed to the failure of U.S. foreign policy and development discourses to adequately account for the diversity and heterogeneity of Afghan women's lives or to offer the kind of grounded analysis that emerges from third world feminist critiques. By deconstructing this figure and revealing

it to be a fetish that is abstracted from the real, my study points to the need for feminist scholars and activists to explore in more detail the material relations and multiple histories of domination and resistance in Afghanistan. As I pointed out in Chapter One, in contrast to the monolithic and reductive figure of the Afghan woman as an "illiterate Third World woman" that is produced within the neo-imperial imaginary, Afghan women do not constitute a homogenous group: they are divided by region (especially by the rural and urban divide), ethnicity, language, and class. While middle and upper class women in urban areas historically had access to education prior to the Taliban's seizure of power in 1996, poor rural women often lived under the control of local tribal patriarchies that denied them education even when it was legal (Ahmed Gosh 2003; Khan 2014). At the same time, diverse groups of Afghan feminists have organized historically and in the present-day across the boundaries of ethnicity, class, and geography to reclaim literacy and education and to redefine it in ways that have challenged the top-down policies of twentieth-century modernizing colonial elites who sought to transform gender relations from above (Rostami-Povey 2007a, 2007b; Khan 2014). While feminist scholars have begun to unearth these histories, more work is needed to explore how literacy has served as a complex site of social contest not solely between the U.S. and the Taliban – which was the main focus of Chapter One – but *within* Afghanistan itself.[135]

This study also opens up the possibility of rethinking literacy from the perspectives of those deemed "illiterate" and of the planet. Freire's and Spivak's re-visioning of literacy as a method and pedagogy of learning to learn from below makes

[135] See Moghadam 1993, 2005; Ahmed Gosh 2003; Khan 2008, 2014.

room for the "illiterate" to be approached as a producer of knowledge with and from whom we can learn. This revisioning, in turn, points to the importance of approaching oral traditions and knowledge, not as forms of ignorance that literacy overcomes, but rather as ways of knowing that may also be considered forms of "critical literacy." Spivak reminds us of this when she turns to the oral traditions of subaltern women and indigenous traditions of thought and finds in both the elements for an approach to reading and writing the word and the world that is also an ethics of responsibility to the alterity of that world. By reading Spivak's work as a rejoinder to the implicit elitism of international feminisms and the speciesism of Freire, my study points to the need for further work that attends to the knowledge produced by "illiterate Third World women"[136] – knowledge that is most often classified either as myth or as adaptive preferences to oppression within mainstream sociolinguistics and international feminism respectively – and to the alternative models of planetarity that emerge from indigenous traditions of thought and political "resurgence" (Alfred 2009, 22). New research on land-based pedagogy and indigenous systems of thought and ethics has begun to rethink education in ways that embed learners in the land – envisioned as "a system of reciprocal social relations and ethical practices" that settler colonialism attempted to destroy (Wildcat et al. 2014, iii; see also Archibald 2008; Simpson 2013, 2014). While this dissertation only hints at the lessons that such an ethics of planetarity might offer the project of decolonizing literacies, it highlights the need to explore in more detail the continuities and discontinuities between and among Freire's anti-colonial account of critical literacy, Spivak's theories of

[136] Some feminists have already begun this work. See Chopra 2004; Robinson-Pant 2004; Chopra 2011.

transnational and subaltern literacies, and indigenous theories of orality, literacy, and the land. As Spivak reminds us, a transnational feminist ethico-politics must learn to learn from these indigenous traditions a mode of decolonizing critique that can challenge colonial relations of epistemic, political, and economic violence and dispossession that characterize empire both new and old.

Indeed, this dissertation has shown that decolonizing literacies requires more than simply changing the content of literacy education. Learning to learn from the "illiterate," the "oral," and the planet can occur only if this learning is part of a larger project that seeks the democratic transformation of those social relations of pedagogy, communication, and knowledge production – and the attendant unequal geopolitical and economic relations of neoliberal capitalist imperialism and dispossession upon which they rest and which they reproduce – that turn the "illiterate" and the "oral" into objects of rescue and non-human nature into an object of domination. If literacy needs to be decolonized, this project of decolonization must derive from the "illiterate," the "oral," and the planet as teacher. It is only by reaffirming the epistemic and political agency of these others that feminist literacies of decolonization can begin to build non-monologic ethical and political alliances between and among specifically-located, historically-diverse subjects that can contribute to what Okanagan feminist Jeannette Armstrong (1993) calls "the deconstruction-construction of colonialism and the reconstruction of a new order of culturalism and relationship beyond colonial thought and practice" (8).

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